

VIRGINIA WILDLIFE

SEPTEMBER 1986

ONE DOLLAR



SPECIAL HUNTING ISSUE

Huntin' buddies. I get right sentimental about them this time of year. But just wait 'til around mid-December after they've led me up and over vertical ridges or sent me through a tangle of briars and saplings on a man-drive, just to see if I was stupid enough to do it. Then I'll be wishing they'd get hung up on a barbed wire fence somewhere and rot.

But now, I think fondly of them. And I'm wondering what fool adventures they're cooking up for us this year. Every year they think they're getting craftier. They concoct new schemes of finding deer which look terrific on paper, with lots of squiggles and lines designating our position and the deer's position, and where they both shall meet. But which inevitably lead us to a blacktopped road that isn't on the map, or an impassable swamp full of alder bushes.

Last year, I found myself stranded at noon on Thanksgiving Day, watching my dear hunting buddy stand in the middle of a country road, trying his best not to appear lost while unfolding his topo map. I figured we were in trouble when I saw him take 10 steps in one direction, then shake his head and take 10 steps in the opposite direction. He finally folded his green map into a neat square and faced the humiliation of inquiring directions from a woman in a white house who had been curiously watching us for the last 20 minutes.

We found our way back to the truck two hours later. My buddy still insists we were never lost. The map was wrong.

There's something extra special about my hunting buddies. Of course, it's partly because they're hard to come by. There aren't many men who'll take a girl along with them hunting. And, naturally, they'll all admit that they've lost their minds or are merely fulfilling a social obligation.

Just ask Vernon, who tried in vain to teach me how to use a compass and a map to get around in the woods. He still has it in his head that I'm trainable, and thinks nothing of walking me two miles into the woods before dawn to get set up in a good deer stand. We'll walk in pitch-black darkness, with saplings whipping our faces. "Don't need a flashlight." Vernon mumbles. He'll point to a spot and command me *not to move*. So I don't move. I just fall asleep until something wakes me up. Like a couple of gobblers scratching below me on a hillside. Vernon recently reminded me that I didn't shoot at those turkeys that year because I had told him quite calmly that I wanted to save my shells for that deer he had assured me would walk by. His memory is failing him.

But mine gets better with time. I distinctly remember one day during early duck season. We arrived in a beaver swamp at 3:00 in the afternoon. I was soaked to the shoulders from wading 100 yards to an island in the middle of the pond. Vernon didn't tell me that we might need waders. The water was four feet deep and you couldn't see the bottom, but if Vernon waded through it with a full set of cotton hunting clothes on, I was going through it, too. The only thing was, Vernon's 6 feet 2 inches. I'm 5 feet 4 inches. I had to carry my gun and shells over my head. We arrived at our stand dripping wet. Suddenly it occurred to me that we were here awful early. It started to rain. My gun was wet. Water was dripping off my hat and down my nose. It was 3:30 p.m. and my teeth were starting to chatter. I couldn't stand it any longer. "What are we doing here this early, Vern? The ducks aren't going to start flying for another hour."

"Yeah, I know," Vern agreed. "But you got to suffer. I figure that way if you kill a duck, you know you earned it." I could have drowned him.

Still, there's something that keeps you bonded together. Maybe it's the cold water you've sloshed through side by side, the tangles of brush you've crawled through, or the strained, urgent whisper, "There! He's yours. Take him."

Of course, usually you'll walk into the woods with your hunting buddy, take a stand, and split up for the next 12 hours. Then it's you and the woods and the game. But, on the last stand of the day, you're back in whistling distance. I can remember standing quiet, next to a tree on the edge of a ravine late one afternoon in the fall of deer season, watching the night drift in. Looking up and seeing the first star, then the first sliver of a new moon, and feeling my feet getting numb from the cold inside my boots. I remember leaving my stand when I couldn't separate the tree from the darkness falling in, and walking up the hill in the silence of the evening, seeing a dark form standing tall on the ridge. My friend.

"How'd you do? See anything?"

"Nope."

The walk back to the truck was in good silence, the slow, feet-dragging kind. Huntin' buddies. We're never really out of whistling distance.

Virginia Shepherd

Hunting in Virginia

Licenses Required

If you hunt you must have a valid license. Exceptions to this are: (1) Land-owners and tenants who live on the land they rent and who have their land-lords' *written permission*. (2) Virginia residents 65 years of age or older who hunt on private property in the county of their residence. (A \$5 permanent (lifetime) license is required to hunt statewide.)

What licenses you may need depends upon what, where and even how you hunt. A *basic* resident or non-resident license is required of all hunters and is valid for hunting all upland game. If you want to hunt deer, bear and turkey, an *additional* big game license is required. A National Forest permit (stamp) is needed to hunt on National Forest land, and a similar stamp is required to hunt the Piedmont State Forests. An archery hunting license is needed to hunt during special seasons open for bow hunting only. Some western counties require a game damage stamp to hunt deer or bear within their respective boundaries. These are issued by the clerks of the courts in counties where they are required. A federal migratory waterfowl stamp is required for ducks or geese and is available at local post offices. A blind license must be displayed on both stationary and floating blinds in, or on the shores, of public waters east of Interstate 95 *except* in the Eastern Shore counties and the city of Virginia Beach.

Licenses may be obtained from the clerks of most courts and from authorized Commission agents conveniently located throughout the state.

Fees

County or city resident to hunt in county or city of residence\$ 3.00



State resident to hunt statewide 7.50

Nonresident to hunt statewide 30.00

State resident big game license to hunt bear, deer and turkey statewide required in addition to county or state hunting license (holders of lifetime licenses exempt).....7.50

State resident archery license to hunt statewide 10.00

Nonresident big game license to hunt bear, deer and turkey statewide, required in addition to hunting license 30.00

Nonresident archery license to hunt statewide 20.00

Special stamp to hunt deer, bear in Alleghany, Bland, Botetourt, Craig, Floyd, Giles, Grayson, Highland, Patrick, Rockbridge, Russell, Smyth, Washington, and Wythe counties, in addition to other licenses, and sold only by the clerks of those counties (holders of lifetime licenses excepted) 1.00

Nonresident in Floyd, Giles, and Russell counties 1.00

Nonresident in Alleghany, Bland, Botetourt, Craig, Grayson, Highland, Patrick, Rockbridge, Smyth, Washington and Wythe counties5.00

Lifetime hunting, and fishing license for residents 65 years of age and over available from the Commission's Richmond office only.....5.00

National forest permit (stamp) to hunt, fish or trap on national forests,

required in addition to hunting license (holders of lifetime licenses excepted) 2.00

Permit to hunt or trap on Appomattox, Buckingham, Cumberland, Prince Edward and Pocahontas State Forests (sold by the Department of Forestry) may be obtained from Forest Headquarters or Clerk of Court in local counties5.00

Federal migratory bird hunting stamp to take migratory waterfowl, required of persons 16 years of age and over in addition to hunting license and sold at U.S. Post Offices7.50

Nonresident to hunt on shooting preserves only obtainable in counties in which preserves are located 7.50

Where to Hunt

Finding good places to hunt in Virginia requires planning. Simply traveling the highways and byways until you see land not posted with no-hunting signs is *not* the right way to hunt at all!

No privately owned land, posted or not, is open to hunting without first obtaining permission. Written permission is required on posted land and verbal permission in all other cases. Public hunting lands (state and federal) are also available, as well as lands managed by private timber companies.

National Forests

These areas are open to hunting unless otherwise designated. Camping is permitted. An annual \$2 permit (stamp) is required to hunt or fish. Individual Ranger District maps and stamps are available at:

George Washington National Forest Headquarters, Federal Building, Harrisonburg, VA 22801. Ranger District Offices: Bridgewater, Edinburg, Staunton, Hot Springs, Covington, Buena Vista.

Jefferson National Forest Headquarters, Federal Building, 210 Franklin Road, S.W., Roanoke, VA 24011. Ranger District Offices: Blacksburg, Wise, Natural Bridge Station, Marion, New Castle, Wytheville.

Forest Industry Lands

An annual permit is required by each

of these companies. Fees vary. A state license is required in addition to timber permit.

Chesapeake Corporation (Attn: Hunting Permits), West Point, VA 23181. Most of 190,000 acres in 33 eastern counties open for hunting to holders of \$7 permit card. Map of tracts in a specific county on request. Blanket requests for maps not honored.

Continental Forests Investments, Inc., Box 1041, Hopewell, VA 23860-1041 (successor to Continental Can, Continental Forests, Continental Group, KMI-Continental, and KMI Resources). About 250,000 acres in counties south of the James River and in Henrico, New Kent, Charles City, Nelson and Amherst open to permit holders. Permits not valid on other company property north of the James. Permits cost \$10 each (\$5 senior citizens and disabled). Maps showing property locations are \$1 each if request is accompanied by a 10" x 13" or larger self-addressed envelope with 39¢ postage.

Champion International Corporation, Forest Lands Manager, Box 309, Roanoke Rapids, NC 27870. About 34,000 acres in Southside counties, some of which is leased for exclusive use of local organized hunting clubs. Individual county permits are \$3 and a statewide permit is \$7. Send self-addressed stamped envelope and check with permit request.

Glatfelter Pulp Wood Company, Box 868, Fredericksburg, VA 22404. Counties with one or more tracts open for hunting include Fauquier, Culpeper, Spotsylvania, Orange, Loudoun, Hanover, Fluvanna, Buckingham, Cumberland, Halifax, Nottoway, Appomattox, Lunenburg, King George and Caroline. Total about 25,000 acres. Some acreage leased for exclusive use and so posted; all other unposted properties open to holders of \$10 permit. Location map or directions to tracts in a specific county will be sent with permit on request.

The Lester Group, Forestland Department, Post Office Drawer 4991, Martinsville, VA 24115. Tracts are

available for lease at a minimum \$1.50 an acre or property taxes, whichever is greater. Some public hunting is available. There are 20,000 acres in the counties of Franklin, Halifax, Henry and Pittsylvania.

Owens—Illinois Company, Eastern Woodlands, Box 40, Big Island, VA 25426, 804/299-5911. There are 30,000 acres in valley and western piedmont counties. Permits are \$5 each, on request with check and self-addressed stamped envelope. No walk-in sales at company office.

USG Industries, Inc. Box 300 Altavista, VA 24727. About 36,000 acres open in western and southern piedmont counties. Permits \$5 on request accompanied by self-addressed stamped envelope.

Westvaco, Virginia Woodlands, Box WV, Appomattox, VA 24522. More than 170,000 acres open in 21 counties. Some tracts leased exclusively to hunting clubs. Combination hunting and fishing permits for \$8, upon request and accompanied by self-addressed stamped envelope, and current hunting and fishing license number(s). Maps on request made at time of permit purchase, but available only for certain counties (none west of the Blue Ridge).

Flippo Lumber Corporation, P.O. Box 38, Doswell, VA 23047. Between 10 and 11,000 acres in Hanover, Caroline, King William, King and Queen and Louisa counties. \$7.00 permits must be obtained in person with valid state hunting license.

Bear Island Paper Company, P.O.





Box 2119, Ashland, VA 23005. About 250,000 acres in counties north of the James River and in Henrico, New Kent, Charles City, Nelson and Amherst open to permit holders. Permits not valid on other company property south of the James. Permits cost \$10 each, and individual county maps showing property locations are \$1 each if request is accompanied by a 10" x 13" or larger self-addressed envelope with 39¢ postage.

Military Areas

U.S. Marine Corps Base, Quantico. 54,000 acres in Fauquier, Prince William and Stafford Counties. A minimum of 15% of the available hunt spaces each day are reserved for off-post military and civilian hunters. All must purchase a \$8 annual MCDEC hunting permit available from the game

warden at the Quantico warden headquarters, plus free daily hunt permit. Shotguns and bow and arrow are the only weapons permitted. Shotgun slugs are required for deer hunting. Blaze orange must be worn. Deer may not be hunted with dogs or by driving. Certain areas allow muzzleloaders. Base permit not available without participation in Quantico Safety Lecture which is given at 5:30, 8:00, 12:00 noon, Monday-Saturday (except Friday) from Oct. 1-Feb. 28 and during spring gobbler season. Call 703/640-5240 for details.

Fort Pickett Military Reservation. 45,198 acres in Nottoway, Brunswick and Dinwiddie Counties. Hunting normally permitted daily except Sundays during regular season and special archery season. Daily hunting quotas controlled by military training com-

mitments (certain areas are closed from time to time due to troop training). Shotguns (no slugs) and bow and arrow are only weapons permitted. Dogs may be used in hunting deer, birds, squirrels and rabbits. Dove hunting is permitted on Wednesdays and Saturdays only. Fees set per outdoor recreation activity, hunting, fishing, camping, etc. Phone 804/292-2618 for fees and map or write to Commanding Officer, U.S. Army Garrison, attn: Game Checking Station, Bldg., 420 Fort Pickett, VA 23824.

Fort A.P. Hill Military Reservation. 77,000 acres in Caroline County. Fee permits issued on a first-come-first-served basis from hunting section office. Shotgun and bow and arrow are only weapons permitted. Dogs may not be used to hunt deer. Blaze orange must be worn during deer season. Dove hunting on Wednesdays and Saturdays only during the regular dove season. Maps available. Write to: Morale Support Activities, attn: Hunt Check Station, Fort A.P. Hill, Bowling Green 22427. Phone: 804/633-8415. A state license is required and a \$5.00 permit.

Cooperative Public Hunting Areas

The Commission of Game and Inland Fisheries is responsible for wildlife management on some 250,000 acres of land it does not own in return for hunting privileges and benefits to sportsmen.

Piedmont State Forests

These are owned by the Virginia Department of Forestry. **Cumberland State Forest**, 15,105 acres in western Cumberland County north of U.S. 60. **Appomattox-Buckingham State Forest**, 18,534 acres south of Route 24 in Appomattox and Buckingham counties. **Prince Edward State Forest**, 6,365 acres in eastern Prince Edward County north of Route 360.

All of the above are open to holders of a \$2 stamp available from agents

located near the properties. Maps are available from the Game Commission or the Virginia Department of Forestry, P.O. Box 3758, University Station, Charlottesville, VA 22903.

U.S Army Corps of Engineers

4,750 acres in Patrick, Henry and Franklin counties surrounding Philpott Reservoir. No permit required. Shotguns only. Map available from Reservoir Manager, Route 2, Box 140, Bassett, Virginia 24055.

38,000 acres in Mecklenburg County surrounding Kerr Reservoir. No permit required. Shotguns only. Map available from Reservoir Manager, Route 1, Box 76, Boydton, Virginia 23917.

3,261 acres in Dickenson County surrounding John W. Flannagan Reservoir. No permit required.

2,722 acres in Wise County surrounding North Fork Pound Reservoir. No permit required.

State Parks

Fairystone State Park—2,400 acres in Patrick and Henry counties only. No permit required. Remainder of park closed to hunters except for camping and other park activities.

Sayler's Creek Battlefield State Park—240 acres in Amelia and Prince Edward counties. No permit required. No maps.

Pocahontas State Park—5,500 acres in Chesterfield county. Map available.

Grayson-Highland State Park—1,200 acres in Grayson county. No permit required. Map available.

False Cape State Park—4,000 acres in Virginia Beach. Limited waterfowl hunting by permit on Barbours Hill area. Limited deer hunting on daily quota basis.

Industrial Lands

Appalachian Power Company Cooperative Management Areas—6,000 acres surrounding Smith Mountain Lake in Bedford and Pittsylvania counties. No permit required. Maps from Regional Planning Commission, Box 456, Chatham, VA 24531. Additional 13,000 acres in tracts in Campbell, Carroll, Franklin, Giles, Grayson,



Montgomery, Pulaski and Russell counties, open unless otherwise posted, no maps.

Union Camp Corporation Cooperative Management Areas—16,000 acres in Brunswick County near Edgerton south of Route 58, in several tracts. No permit required. Map available.

Owens-Illinois Company Cooperative Management Areas—35,000 acres open in Botetourt and Rockbridge counties. No permit required, no maps.

Westvaco Cooperative Management Area—900 acres in Amherst, and Nelson counties. No permit required. Maps available on request.

Commission Owned Public Hunting Lands

The Commission of Game and Inland Fisheries owns 175,797 acres of land in Virginia purchased with hunters' license dollars and open to public hunting with a minimum of restrictions. With the exception of the daily blind permits on waterfowl areas at Back Bay and Hog Island, there is no charge for hunting on these areas.

are open for the early archery seasons. Dove hunting is permitted during the regular open season on Wednesdays and Saturdays only.

Amelia Wildlife Management Area—2,217 acres in Amelia County. Deer, squirrel, turkey, raccoon, quail, doves, and waterfowl.

Back Bay Hunting Areas—Pocahontas, 737 acres; Trojan, 406 acres. Fee hunting areas with blinds allocated by drawing. Information on blinds, fees and drawings available from the Game Commission after September 1.

Briery Creek Wildlife Management Area—2,775 acres in Prince Edward County. Deer, turkey, quail and doves.

C.F. Phelps Wildlife Management Area—4,425 acres in Fauquier County. Deer, squirrel, rabbits, and quail.

Chickahominy Wildlife Management Area—4,846 acres in James City County. Deer, squirrel, rabbits, quail, waterfowl and doves. Floating waterfowl blinds only.

Clinch Mountain Wildlife Management Area—25,477 acres in Smyth, Russell, Tazewell, and Washington counties. Grouse, rabbit, squirrel, deer, turkey, bear and raccoon.

Elm Hill Wildlife Management Area—1,275 acres in Mecklenburg County. Upland game, and dove.

Fairystone Farms Wildlife Management Area—5,286 acres in Patrick and Henry counties. Camping nearby at Fairystone State Park. Deer, raccoon, and squirrel.

G. Richard Thompson Wildlife Management Area—4,007 acres in Fauquier County. Turkey, deer, grouse and squirrel.

Gathright Wildlife Management Area—13,428 acres in Bath and Alleghany counties. Waterfowl, bear, deer, grouse, quail, rabbit, raccoon, squirrel, and turkey (spring season only).

Goshen Wildlife Management Area—16,128 acres in Rockbridge County. Bear, deer, grouse, raccoon, squirrel, and turkey.

Hardware River Wildlife Management Area—880 acres in Fluvanna County. Deer, squirrel, quail, grouse,

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September

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Squirrel season opens this month in much of the state. Veteran squirrel hunters tell author Bruce Ingram some of their tactics on squirrels. See page 20 for details. Photo by Michael R. McCormack.

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Special Hunting Section

The 1986 Virginia Hunter's Guide provides where-to-go information, license and permit requirements, and last season's statewide harvest information. Also included in this special section is the 1986 hunting season forecast.

Note: The 1986 Virginia Hunter's Guide is available in reprint form free from the Game Commission, Education Division, P.O. Box 11104, Richmond, VA 23230-1104.

Cover

White-tailed deer; photo by William S. Lea.
Inside back cover: Labrador retriever; photo by Karl Maslowski



A Mournful Season

A one-dove season can be a nightmare—unless you remember that there's always next year.

by Joel M. Vance

There was a little splash of feathers where I'd field-dressed the dove, now several weeks old and matted by intervening rains.

They were a sad little tribute to a sad little season.

The mourning dove is the most prolific of all game birds, with an estimated 550 million hatched every year. Of that, some 50 million bare their breasts to the basting spoon. No other game bird is in the ball park. Next is the bobwhite quail with an estimated 35 million harvest. Ruffed grouse, the proclaimed king of game birds? Maybe three million in a good year.

So why did I go through an entire season with but one dove in the pot?

It was the season that we all fear, the bummer, the nightmare that makes you start up in the middle of the night with cold sweat and a dim memory of something bad happening.

It also was the season where theory became reality and reality was thin soup for hungry hunters.

Doves are migratory game birds and are more sensitive to cold weather than



Above: Brittany spaniel with dove; photo by Joel Vance. Opposite: Mourning dove; photo by William S. Lea.

any bird save a couple of the duck species. Give a young dove (and most doves are young, since the annual mortality is perhaps 80 percent) a night of rain with temperatures in the 50's and he will head for Texas where hunters kill more doves than anywhere.

Sure, you will find doves in the north even in December, huddled against bitter winds and snows, but not many of them. While one grouse or pheasant is a trophy, one dove is not. Those who

oppose dove hunting claim there isn't enough meat on one to make it worthwhile hunting. Well, one peanut doesn't make a snack either, but that doesn't mean we should quite raising and eating peanuts.

I think every hunter needs a one-dove season to re-establish his priorities and attitudes. When things are going well, we begin to think of annual production as we think of a corn crop. True, wildlife is a harvestable crop, but it isn't *ours*—it is nature's and if she chooses to move her crops farther south for the benefit of some other shooter with a sorghum drawl, I have no right to complain.

But, I'm not sure our dogs understand one-dove seasons. They expect more and mine expect me to provide, for I always do. I am the one who takes care of their every need, food, shelter . . . and doves. If anyone gets the blame for the lack of birds, it won't be the weather or habitat loss. It will be me.

Dogs have incredibly long memories. They never forget the location of something filthy to roll in or to eat. Nor do



Every year promises a new dove season, but no one can guarantee the doves. Who knows if a cold snap or a bad corn crop will send the birds south or into another field? Photos by Joel Vance.



they forget the location of good hunting experiences. The instant we hit the gravel road, they are at the windows, spotting familiar landmarks, intent on the meadowlarks that labor with un-gainly effort over the fences.

Of course, a one-dove season is not good for the dogs either, aside from the exercise they get. I consider doves a training bird for my bird dogs. The animals learn to hunt dead and retrieve (if they'll bring in a dove, they'll bring in anything), to obey hand signals, to sit and stay, in short nearly everything a bird dog needs to know except hunting to find the birds in the first place.

Opening day was hot, in the 90's. We flushed a huge covey of quail and there were deer tracks everywhere. A

dove flushed out of standing milo. Guff went on point, a heat-grin marring his intensity.

I thought he had a rabbit, but a single quail flushed, an easy straightaway shot. Quail, of course, were out of season. Doves, which were not, were noticeable by their absence. Save for the single bird which had surprised me, there were none, in the air or on the ground.

I couldn't blame Guff for his lack of form. It was just too hot, another strike against dove hunting. There is no snap to the air in dove season. The atmosphere is clogged with gnats and mosquitoes. And, while ragweed is beloved of doves, it certainly isn't by us hayfever sufferers. I've had dogs turn completely yellow from falling pollen and have felt

so congested myself that I thought I'd die right there in the steaming field. I don't mind enduring cold, hunger, snow, or rain for game, but I despise heat.

Still, in a many-dove season, I can endure some pretty ghastly weather for the sake of shooting at a limit of dove. And I say "shooting at" with the knowledge that every writer who ever described a dove hunt spent much of it telling how many shots he fired for how few doves he hit.

It's a given the birds are hard to hit. The best shooters rarely do better than three birds for five shots. I've seen competent shooters spend a box of shells without ruffling a feather. But, much of my problem is that I usually



have time to think about the shots. Only rarely does a dove pop into view so suddenly that the only shot is an instinctive one. I hit more of these than I do the long incoming bird who is in view for an eternity. On rare occasions, doves will land in a low standing crop such as milo or sunflowers where the ground is bare between the rows. Then it's possible to jump shoot them and that makes it more like quail shooting.

But, in this one-dove season, there were neither incoming birds nor jump-shot birds. There were no birds.

Now we came to a weed patch managed for doves. There are several ways to manage for the gray ghosts, some legal, some not. Planting seedhead crops that doves like is perfectly acceptable.

Throwing grain on the ground is baiting and is a federal offense. Doves thoroughly enjoy black-seeded sunflowers, the kind grown for their oil content, but also like the farmer's nemesis, fox-tail. Millet and proso are other good seeds for doves.

Whatever the food supplied, the field must be managed to attract doves and that means bare or sparsely covered ground. Doves need bare spots to move around, which makes silage cut superb. There is shattered grain, and cultivated, weedless ground. Disking a crop or burning it also will work. It takes about 10 days after the management technique before doves come into the field in any appreciable numbers.

I kept thinking things would get bet-

ter, but they never did. So that the one dove breast, that avian single peanut, is in the freezer now, nestled next to a comfortable package of woodcock.

And I know that if the weather cooperates and the air is thick with pollen and gnats and the corn is out, next season may see the sky gray with flickering doves. Then if I have a one dove season, it will be only because I can't hit them, not because they aren't there to hit.

Read this, dogs. Things will get better.

Trust me . . . □

Joel M. Vance is the news writer for the Missouri Department of Conservation and is a freelance writer for several national outdoor magazines.

The Sporting Life

*The sea has once again
claimed Hog Island for its own,
but not so long ago the island
was known for its grand
sporting life.*

*by Curtis Badger
photos courtesy of The Nature Conservancy*

There is an island along the Virginia coast where a century ago there was a village of several hundred people. The village is gone now, gone without a trace. There are no ghost-town homes, no abandoned stores. Even the village cemetery is gone. There is no detritus of human existence here; nothing to touch and feel, only the ghost stories that are whispered on the wind.

The Indians called the island Machipongo. John Smith, when he landed there in 1608, named it Shooting Bears Island. And later, for reasons that can only be guessed, the island became known as Hog. Some say a ship carrying hogs wrecked on the treacherous shoals that fringe the seaward edge of the island, and that the hogs swam ashore and established a feral population. Some say the island's name is an abbreviated version of quahog, the hardshell clam found in abundance in the island waters. One writer has speculated that the island was so named because the hog was the animal the village people most closely resembled.



The Goeringer Club House pictured above was one of the facilities built on Hog Island in the early 1900s that accommodated sporting clubs on the island.



In 1672, 25 colonists were granted a patent to the island, and they lived there for an undetermined time. No one knows what became of the settlement. The colonists disappeared—man, woman, and child—leaving no clues as to their fate, no history or written record, no descendants to pass on the word of their misfortune. The disappearance is as mysterious as that of Sir Walter Raleigh's Lost Colony of North Carolina. Were the settlers victims of

Indian attack, of disease, or were they claimed en masse by some great unrecorded natural disaster?

No other record of human habitation exists until Labin Phillips settled there during the American Revolution. After the war, more and more settlers were drawn to the remote island, where they found plentiful game and fish and fertile soil for gardens. The earliest settlers, in the years preceding the marketing of waterfowl and shellfish, made

their living by salvaging vessels that had grounded and wrecked on the nearby shoals. It was not until 1853 that the government built a lighthouse on the island, followed 20 years later by a life-saving station.

The settlement grew in the late 1800s, and by the turn of the century there were more than 200 persons on the island. A church was built in 1880, and Capt. Charles Sterling, in his 1903 history of Hog Island, reports that there

was a school with 34 students, a hotel, two stores, and a sportsman's club.

The sporting life drew people to Hog Island. Writes Sterling: "Hog Island is, at certain seasons of the year, ideal ground for the sportsman. Machipongo Inlet and its channels is a famous feeding ground of the wild geese and that king of wild fowl, the brant, and the marshes abound with black duck. In the spring and summer the curlew, willet, and graybacks flock to the oyster shoals and ponds in the meadows . . .

In the creeks, channels, inlets and ocean are found every variety of fish. The delicious hog fish and sheepshead are found in abundance. Fine fishing is the rule and not the exception.

The marshes abound in soft crabs. On the sandy beach the clams are taken in numbers either to fill a canoe or ship. And then the diamond-back terrapin has its home in the creeks that run through the swamps and estuaries that border the place. Indeed nature has so bountifully endowed Hog Island that it discounts that fabled island of Calypso."

Nature's indulgence accomplished two things for Hog Island. It attracted to the island a group of independent, self-reliant individuals who sought freedom from the social and economic constraints of life in mainland towns. The plentiful fish and game also attracted wealthy sportsmen from northern cities, some of whom purchased the land and built hunting lodges in the island village of Broadwater.

While some villagers quickly discovered that catering to wealthy visitors was an easier way to make a living than dredging oysters or raking clams, the majority opinion was not in favor of the wealthy northerners who had come in the name of sport to harvest the bounty of the island. Despite Sterling's glowing description of Hog Island's natural resources, island life could be harsh and demanding. The isolated life of the islanders was tied closely to the natural scheme of things. They caught their supper with their hands, they paid only with their labor, and they assumed with good grace that they would suffer through cycles of privation, then reap





Above: This 1890 photograph was taken of Captain George Doughty, the keeper of the Hog Island lighthouse. Here he is hunting shorebirds with the aid of a set of decoys at the water's edge. Left: The original 1853 Hog Island lighthouse and keeper's cottage. This beacon served mariners until 1896, when it was replaced by a steel one.

great profits when nature was generous. Such an existence produced people of simplicity, directness, independence, and reliance. To live such a life was to accept the benevolence of nature without questioning, because what was given today might well be taken away tomorrow.

Islanders worked when they had to, slept when they were tired, ate when hungry, and saw little reward in doing otherwise. The visiting sportsmen, accustomed to discipline, good manners, strict schedules, and adherence to rigorous codes of sporting ethics, were put off by the natives, who were seen as corrupt, lazy, unkempt, ne'er-do-wells. The islanders, for their part, resented the well-outfitted, arrogant, educated visitors who complicated their simple lives by translating their way of life into frivolous sport.

Two histories of Hog Island provide fascinating views from separate windows. Charles Sterling's 40-page history was published in 1903. Sterling was a keeper of the Hog Island lighthouse from 1901 to 1907, and his account is clearly an attempt to enoble the island and its people. In 1908 Alexander Hunter published a wonderful book titled *The Huntsman in the South*, a compilation of hunting adventures in Virginia and North Carolina. One of the most interesting chapters of Hunter's book deals with Hog Island.

Hunter's history and Sterling's account are virtually identical through much of the discussion, but the conclusions drawn by the two writers are poles apart, despite being based upon identical factual information. Here is Sterling's idyllic description of life on Hog Island: "The community is as peaceful as the inhabitants of Rasselas' Happy Valley. There is no justice of the peace, no constable, no machinery of the law, for amongst this law-abiding, God-fearing set, there has not been a crime committed within the memory of man."

Hunter argues that there is another reason for the low crime rate: "Living in a land where no one need work, and where nature has given them a fine climate, the

ocean and land, and food in plenty, we might expect to find as ideal a community as ever existed in Rasselas's Happy Valley; but such is not the fact. The islanders are below mediocrity. There are some bright examples, but the majority are slothful, and their dispositions mean and malicious. There are no criminals among them, for the reason that they have not the energy or spirit to commit a crime, except in the breaking of the game laws. They fish and hunt, and labor for a few weeks gathering oysters, and this labor gives them enough money to live at ease and comfort. Most of these islanders hibernate like an animal; they eat heavily, and then doze for hours. Some of them recline and repose twenty hours out of the twenty-four."

It was Hunter who suggested that the island was so named because "the inhabitants were more like hogs in looks, manners, and way of living than anything else."

There is the possibility that Hunter's insults were delivered with tongue planted firmly in cheek, and were accepted in that light by the victims. To Eastern Shoremen, an insult is the sincerest expression of affection and acceptance, and it is possible that Hunter and the islanders exchanged good-natured barbs.

The point on which Hunter and Sterling agreed was the abundance of fish and game, a resource greatly coveted by the sporting public, but jealously guarded by the island residents. Wealthy industrialists and politicians from the North purchased property on the island, and built opulent hunting clubs. But the tourism industry was not sanctioned by the majority of the islanders, and it was hotly opposed in many instances. Hunter writes that the islanders could have made a fortune by accommodating yachtsmen, hunters, fishermen, and vacationers. Instead, they snubbed strangers and deliberately practiced night-shooting to drive the waterfowl away from the blinds of the wealthy clubmen, until the strangers withdrew in disgust.

Before the great beds of eelgrass disappeared from the seaside Eastern Shore

in the late 1920s, tens of thousands of brant wintered in the bays that separated the barrier islands from the mainland. One of the most remarkable passages in Hunter's Hog Island narrative describes a late night December storm observed from the lighthouse, where thousands of brant hovered blindly around the intense light.

After an unsuccessful day of hunting, Hunter retired for the night and was awakened at 2 a.m. by the assistant lightkeeper, who told him that the brant were flocking by the thousands around the lighthouse. The two men put on their oilskins and slowly made their way across the enclosure and up the spiral steps of the tower. From the shelter of the keeper's room, which was just under the 200-foot-high light, they watched as the great flock of brant became mesmerized by the intense light:

"The brant, the shyest, wildest, most timid of waterfowl, were within five feet of us, but, evidently blinded by the light, they could see nothing. Some would circle around the tower, others dart by; and wonderful to relate, some would remain stationary in the air, their wings moving so rapidly that they were blurred like a wheel in rapid motion. I thought at the time what a tremendous power must lie in their wings to enable them to nullify the wind that the instrument inside indicated was blowing 65 miles an hour.

The lamp in the tower revolved every forty-five seconds, and for a short time every bird was in the vivid glare, which displayed every graceful curve of neck and head, and the set and balance of the body, and enabled one to look into their brilliant eyes.

The brant is not a glossy, showy bird like the wood-duck or mallard, but in the driving rain and under the powerful rays of the lamp they were exquisitely beautiful; their plumage looked like ebony, and the tints changed to many an iridescent hue. Every few seconds, above all the rush of the wind, would be heard a loud tinkling sound as a blinded brant, dazed by the rays, would strike the double two-inch plateglass that surrounded the burner, and fall dead from the impact; sometimes dying on the platform of the tower, but more often falling to the ground."



On the night of the storm, Hunter had been staying in the lightkeeper's quarters with his fellow historian, Charles Sterling. Sterling, wrote Hunter, picked up 28 dead brant, and at the base of the tower, islanders and their dogs collected dozens of dead or stunned waterfowl, "the exact number they never divulged."

While most of us will probably react to that story with sympathy for the unfortunate brant, to the islanders it was a serendipitous event. When nature is your provider, it is wise to accept such gifts as they come, because such benevolence is rare.

The people of Hog Island represented the final chapter of Virginia's colonial spirit. They were opportunists, and their disdain for hunting laws and ethics made them ready targets for fair-minded writers such as Hunter. But Hunter probably understood these island people well enough to know that their refusal to bend to social and moral constraints was certainly not a matter of

contempt for the wildfowl, or even for the society that had imposed the restrictions. The islanders believed strongly in independence and self reliance, and they had overwhelming, if naive, confidence that God and Nature would provide for them, that the waterfowl would continue to come in great numbers, that the fish would always fill their nets, that the oysters would always grow fat and fertile.

It is not surprising that the island village did not survive the twentieth century. The islanders had survived numerous violent coastal storms and floods, but it was the more subtle process of erosion that finally doomed the village. In the 1920s and early 1930s the shoreline was disappearing at an alarming rate, and the great pine forests that had covered the upland part of the island were being claimed by the ocean. Even the most stubborn islanders realized that the days were numbered for their village. So, 50 years ago, the homes, the church, the school and stores were jacked up and loaded on barges, and a mass migration was begun. In a few years, all of the substantial buildings on the island, with the exception of the two coast guard stations, were moved to the mainland. Numerous homes in the Eastern Shore towns of Oyster and Willis Wharf were once part of the village of Broadwater on Hog Island.

Even if it were not for the encroaching ocean, the village was probably already doomed, in spirit if not in fact. By the 1930s, travel and communication endangered the islander's way of life. Just as nature abhors a vacuum, modern society abhors isolation and individualism. If the village were alive today, it wouldn't be the one that Alexander Hunter and Charles Sterling knew. And though both men saw the village and its people differently, it is probably safe to say that they would agree that the death a half-century ago of the village was a merciful and timely one. □

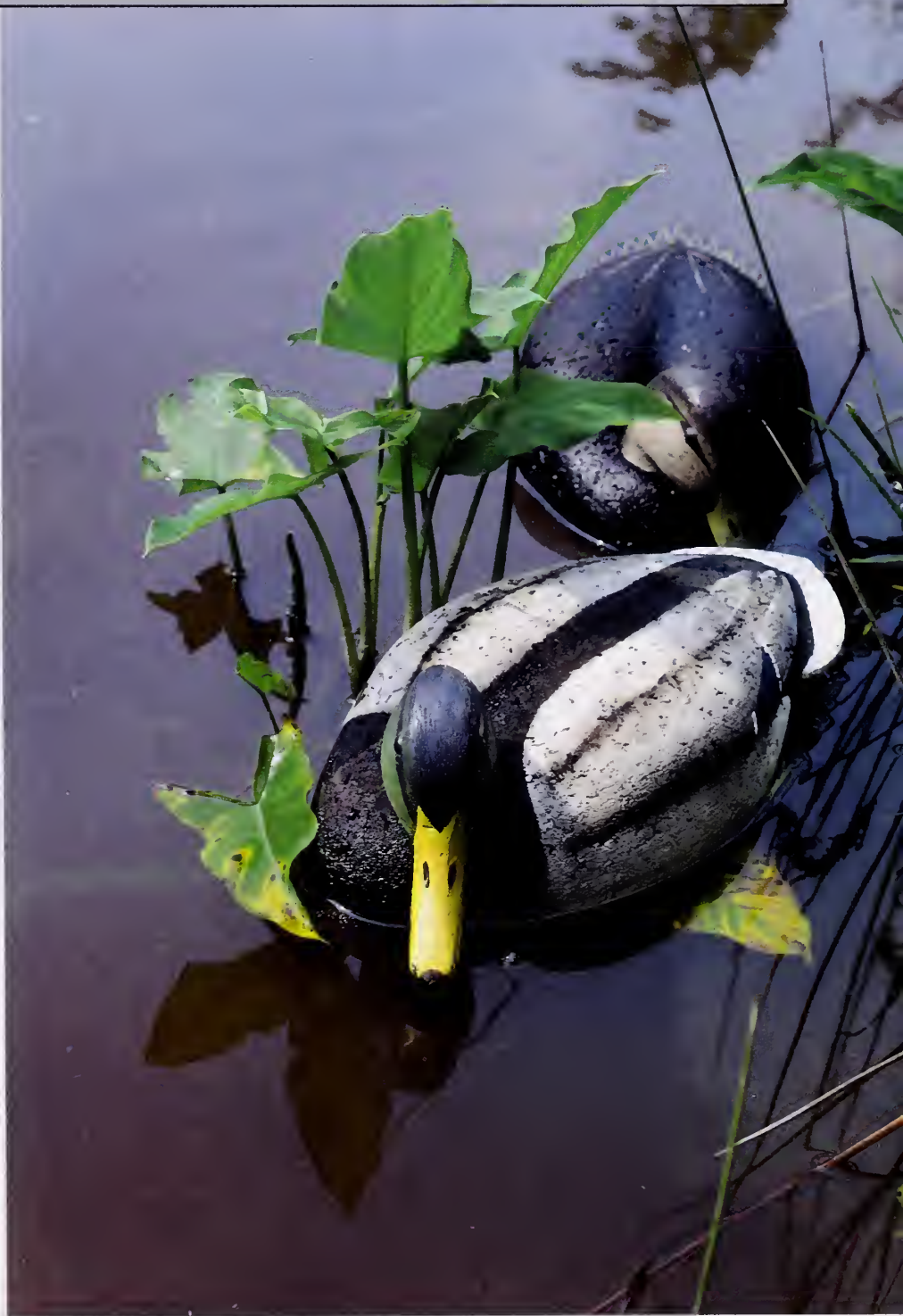
Curtis Badger is director of publications for the Wildfowl Art Museum of the Ward Foundation in Maryland, and is a frequent contributor to Virginia Wildlife.

A Few Ducks Fell

by Jeff Curtis

In these times of high-tech hunting, a few hard-earned ducks are what really matter.

*photos by
Cindie Brunner*



Recently, a friend of mine was talking to a classroom of students, young and old, about improving their skills as anglers. He was saying how they didn't have the equipment back then that we do now for fishing. They used cranky fishing reels and measured a good day by the number of blacklashes you *did not* have. And how you considered yourself lucky if you knew somebody who knew somebody that had a boat.

He was mostly talking about how the hardships gave them a few things we don't have now. Like the feeling of success when only a few good fish were caught fairly, with rod and reel and probably with live bait, if not a wooden plug. He was talking about landing a bait precisely where you wanted it and being out for a day unfettered with electronic time-savers and go-getters. About watching the water and the sky. He was talking about not taking things for granted.

And that not only applies to fishing. It's the same when in the deer woods, in the beaver swamps, the mountain streams. Our outdoor experiences are too valuable for us to take things for granted, no matter how small they may seem.

I had the most terrific, lousiest duck season last year.

First of all, I don't have private marsh privileges or a river blind flanked at 500 yards by a couple of dummy blinds. Don't know if I want them.

Most of my ducking is done in a couple of beaver ponds in a bottom at the end of a deer path leading from a dirty access road off the main highway. And shooting a beaver pond means that sometimes there's ducks and sometimes there aren't. You take what you can get and hope that the weather's bad enough somewhere to keep them off the big water and forced back into the ponds. The ponds I'm hunting.

Secondly, most of my hunting is done alone except for the dog who is always with me. That means that I've got an approving but not very helpful partner when it comes to locating a blind, setting decoys, and most importantly, calling to what may come by.

Thus, any mistakes that end up in flared or uninterested ducks are my

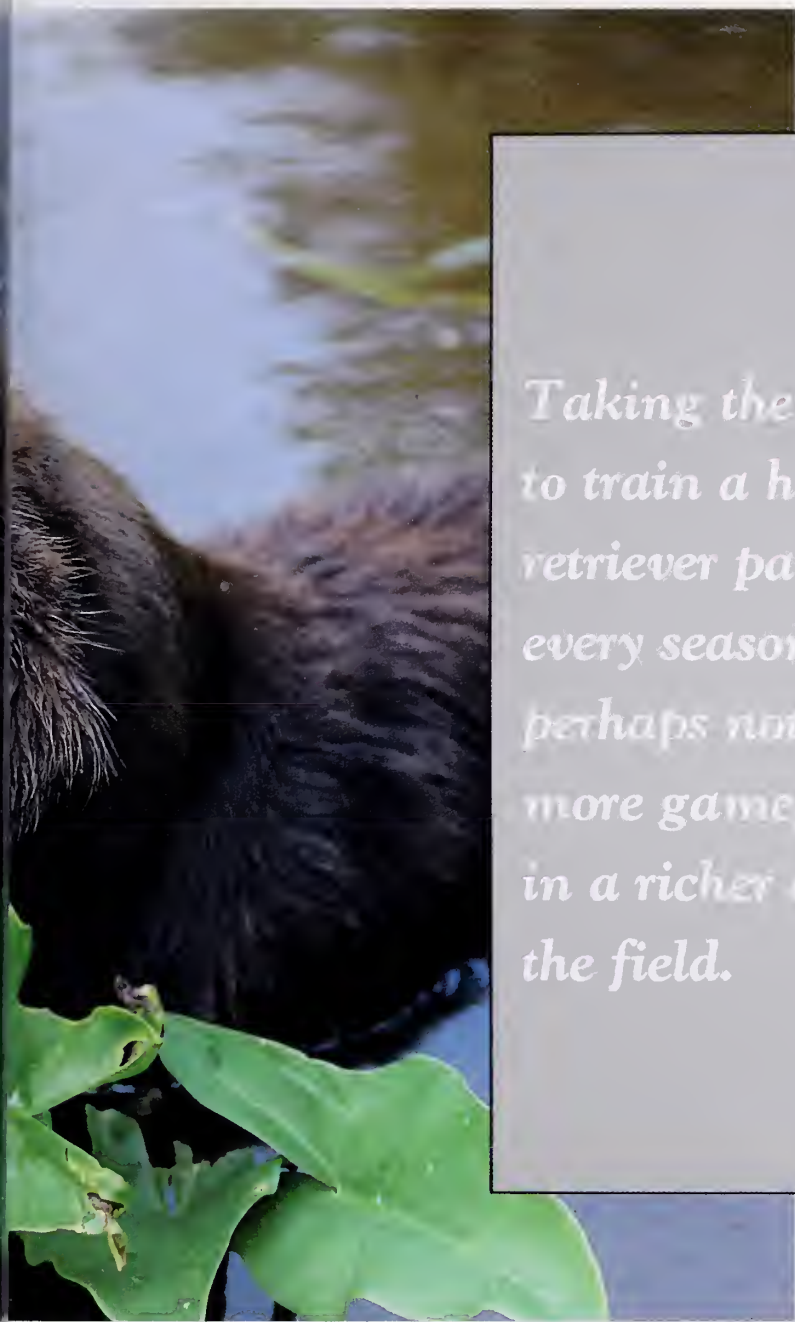


mistakes. But any successes are mine. I got so that this year even a bag of one was trophy. A few times, more than one was retrieved and admired, but a lot came and went. But when they came, they came because we found our own water, built a good hide, placed the blocks fairly and sounded so good on those double reeds.

Without the benefit of sanctioned marshes and blinds, and having to depend upon my own efficiency with gun and call means that real success is measured in smaller portions, not the least of which is becoming familiar with

the habits and preferences of the game. I learned how particular a black is when he's inspecting the fakes and when a mallard needs a convincing little chuckle from the duck call. I learned to enjoy watching my dog. I learned to appreciate watching the water and sky.

On the last day of the season, more out of a sense of duty than anything else, we again packed in a half-dozen corks, snuggled into the blind and waited out the rising sun. Then off to the right in a little leg of the pond, a stranger with a dog approached. Said he discovered my pond while deer hunting



*Taking the time
to train a hunting
retriever pays off
every season—
perhaps not in
more game, but
in a richer day in
the field.*

a few weeks back. While we were introducing ourselves to each other, two mallards, high and steady, crossed left to right over the treetops and were gone. A few, loud and confident come-backs from my caller turned them back as if they were on a leash. And on their first pass, at better than 50 yards, my new hunting partner started hammering away at them.

Apparently never having used the tool called a duck call, his reaction of course, was to take them as you saw them, even if it might mean a crippling shot. Which it did. I was mad. Mad

because those birds could have been put down into the decoys. Mad because a lot of practice went unused because of his impatience. But I think that, more than mad, I was disappointed. I would have loved to have just watched those ducks circle a couple of times.

It was then that I realized that the same thing applies to all forms of outdoor pursuits, whether it be duck hunting or fishing. This guy, though he had all of the makings of a duck hunter, was there just to kill ducks. He had no interest in the hunt, the skills used in a fair chase of his game, or the surround-

ings. He wore a two-hundred dollar Gore-tex coat but hadn't spent five bucks or any time on a duck call. He had a healthy Chesapeake that would not even heel. He had driven to the pond on one of those new 3-wheelers, but never used the time he saved to build a decent blind.

Unlike the days of those temperamental fishing reels, we have technologically advanced equipment. Most of the good quality stuff is priced to meet everybody's budget, readily obtainable and of better quality than most of our skills. We buy the stuff and then neglect the real reason for being outdoors. We cheat ourselves when the kill becomes more important than the hunt.

Unless you've experienced the sense of pride from calling in some ducks by yourself, you can't imagine how good it feels to make one honest kill under such conditions. It's the same feeling you get about working with a dog you trained. Many men would just as soon stay home in a warm bed if they couldn't see their most trusted companion swim through the spread and pick up a downed duck.

I'm going to try carving my own decoys this year. From what I understand, the men that do make their own blocks refuse to hunt with anything else. Besides, the fakes don't need to be anatomically perfect like the decoratives in the carving shows. Realistic and worthy of the water makes a convincing decoy. It'll be like stepping back a few years when we were all a bit more self-sufficient. Besides, it'll be nice knowing that it was time I spent training the retriever, learning to blow a duck call, and carving my own decoy spread that yielded a magnificent puddler.

Perhaps I've come to appreciate the blind-building, dog-training and decoy carving more than most because I've never known the "old days" of 20 bird limits and live decoys. Waterfowling has always been mud-sucking, finger-numbing hard work for me since day one. But being out there gives me a lot of pleasures that most people never get to experience.

Like I said, few ducks fell to the retriever this year. But what a season. □

Jeff Curtis is the wildlife education coordinator for the Game Commission and an avid hunter and outdoorsman.

Food, shelter, and water. Habitat. There is just not enough of it. The water and food may be plentiful, but if there is no place to hide or rest, then an animal will leave and go elsewhere. Or die.

Quail need edges to nest, and young turkeys can chase insects all summer long in tall grasses and weeds. Clover is added nourishment for a rabbit or deer, and the cottontail utilizes brush and patches of honeysuckle for cover. That buck seen out in the soybean field will only be there if enough woodland is nearby to help in his escape at the first hint of danger.

Wildlife managers like to manipulate habitat. But they have to have access to land. On national forest lands, wildlife management areas, and cooperatively managed areas, biologists have the freedom to create diverse plant communities to suit the habitat needs of selected species. On a walk through a mountain hardwood forest on a wildlife management area in Virginia, one will find clearings in the middle of the woods. These one or two acre openings, scattered amid the oaks and hickories, are like islands in the middle of a sea. Lespedeza, clover, and grasses hug the earth, and Autumn olive grows along the edge of the forest. A small stream will be nearby, and if not, then a hole in the ground created by a blast of dynamite serves as a watering spot for the creatures that live in the woods.

Like an oasis, an opening in the forest will attract birds and mammals in search of food and water. For shelter, they will retreat back to the trees. The grouse and turkeys come to feed on the grasshoppers, lespedeza and millet or clover. The Autumn olive seeds are food for songbirds. And, an owl or fox that can catch a mouse, chipmunk or fledgling grouse in the sunlit patch of the clearing may take up residence in the area.

Like a forest without clearings, agricultural land is often a long stretch of monotony. The carrying capacity of quail on acre upon acre of field corn is very small. Food, shelter, and plant diversity is limited. But when a 50-acre corn field can be planted with 45 acres of corn and five acres of lespedeza, clover, and orchardgrass, with some millet thrown in, then local populations

Paying the Rent for Wildlife

Congress has passed a revolutionary Farm bill with a Conservation Reserve Program that rents marginal land from farmers for wildlife.

by Randall Shank



Bobwhite quail are one wildlife species that will benefit from the Conservation Reserve Program of the 1985 Farm Bill; photo by Nell Bolen.

of quail, doves, songbirds, and other species will soon increase, too.

The wildlife manager can create these spots of diversity to help the long term population of a given species on a tract of land. And now, the private landowner has the opportunity and the funding to create islands of diversity that will provide needed food, shelter, and water for wildlife on his own farm. With the enactment of the 1985 Farm Bill by the United States Congress,

every landowner with erodible soil on his property has the chance to take marginal agricultural land out of production for a period of 10 years. On the poorer soils that will not hold topsoil and will not grow the best of crops, the farmer can now plant permanent plant cover that will benefit wildlife.

The purposes of the Conservation Reserve portion of the bill are to conserve soil and water, improve water quality, curb the overproduction of

agricultural commodities that are putting a lot of farmers out of business, increase the timber supply, and to enhance fish and wildlife habitat. The possibility exists, if the stated goals of the program are met, that within the next 10 years, over 20 million acres of land will be taken out of production nationally. These lands will be planted with various cover types to slow down erosion and to benefit wildlife. The goal in Virginia is to take 45,000 acres out of production and to plant these lands with suitable soil holding cover.

Through the Conservation Reserve the farmer can receive financial help for 50 percent of the cost of establishing suitable cover planted on land taken out of production. For not growing an agricultural crop on this land, he will also receive a yearly rental payment from the federal government.

The landowner who is interested in helping to increase the wildlife population on his farm must realize, however, that the Conservation Reserve is not a quick fix. It is a 10-year program. During this time, the landowner can establish a diversity of plant types mixed with ample water supplies to be of help to wildlife. Where shortages of food or cover exist, the farmer can correct the situation and with cost-share help. With the proper conservation plan, the populations of wildfowl, upland birds, and mammals on the farm will increase. For the committed landowner with a long-term approach to conservation, he, like the wildlife manager, can manipulate the habitat on his farm.

The government has set certain guidelines that must be followed on the land taken out of production. Here are some landowner's options with regard to use of his land for wildlife under the program:

Permanent Wildlife Habitat

The purpose is to establish a permanent wildlife habitat cover that will also control erosion. The practice must be applied to eligible cropland that is suitably located and adapted for the establishment of permanent wildlife habitat. The practice must control erosion at an acceptable level. Cost-sharing is available for establishing trees, shrubs, forbs, grasses, legumes, or other vegetative cover that will provide permanent

food, shelter, or cover for wildlife and for erosion control.

Trees

Planting trees is an excellent way to conserve soil, and to enhance water quality. For the first five years after trees are established, the increased diversity of plant types in the young tree stand will be most attractive to quail and rabbits. If the new stand borders an agricultural field and a mature stand of timber, then the three different plant types present will be advantageous to wildlife. As the trees mature, the types and numbers of animal species present can be expected to change. Growing trees certainly helps to increase the availability of foods in the area with lots of weed seeds present in the early years of growth. With maturity, the stand will serve as shelter for different species, including deer.

Shallow Water Ponds

Not only can land submitted for bid in the Conservation Reserve program be planted in a suitable cover, but shallow water ponds may also be developed. Cost-sharing is authorized for earth moving to construct dams.

The idea here is to conserve soil and produce wildlife at the same time. For maximum wildlife benefits, ponds should not be more than 18 inches deep. They should have plenty of aquatic vegetation and contain islands. Japanese miller seeded in the pond site, and then flooded, will provide food for ducks. The SCS can help with pond design.

There are other aspects of the 1985 Farm Bill that farmers and landowners should be aware of. The "Sodbuster" part of the legislation penalizes a farmer for cultivating highly erodible land that has not been cultivated since 1980. If the farmer is in violation of this provision of the bill, he will lose all federal farm benefits for all crops for the year of the violation. Highly erodible land used for crops between 1981 and 1985 would initially be exempt, but that exemption would disappear if the producer fails to introduce a conservation plan by 1990, or within two years after a soil survey, whichever is later. A companion "Swampbuster" part of the bill is aimed to prevent producers from



The Conservation Reserve Program pays farmers for setting aside marginal land for wildlife habitat and for developing that land in wildlife cover or the construction of ponds. All wildlife, including cottontail rabbits and white-tailed deer, will benefit from the program. Clockwise: photos by Steve Maslowski, Lloyd Hill, and Randall Shank.





converting wetlands to crop production.

To get into the Conservation Reserve program, the landowner must contact his local Soil and Water Conservation District Office and work with a soil conservationist in developing a conservation plan for his farm. The plan identifies erodible, unproductive areas on the farm that can be taken out of agricultural production with minimum impact to the farmer. The conservation plan considers the needs of wildlife in the area. For instance, if there is sufficient water and cover nearby, then the erodible land could be planted with some permanent wildlife food source. The individual needs of selected species of wildlife are looked at separately as the plan is developed.

After conferring with the soil conservationist, the farmer submits a bid for the amount of rent that he will accept to take his erodible land out of agricultural use. This bid is submitted through the local ASCS office of the USDA. If the bid is accepted, and the farmer plants the land in an appropriate permanent cover crop, he will then receive payment from the government for 50 percent of the cost of establishing the new practice, and he will also receive an annual rent payment for a maximum of 10 years.

The first two sign-up periods for the program have already been held, but others are planned. As of June of this year, 313 Virginia farmers had been accepted into the program with over 8,400 acres of land being set aside. It is hoped that many more acres will be accepted into the Conservation Reserve during the next sign-up periods.

Stewart Udall, former Secretary of the Interior, once said that "True conservation is ultimately something of the mind—an ideal of men who cherish their past and believe in their future." For the farmer and landowner in Virginia, the future is now. Like no other time in recent memory have landowners had the opportunity at minimum expense to establish permanent pockets of food, shelter, and water on their farms for wildlife. Habitat. There is not enough of it, but now we can create more. □

Randall Shank is an agricultural extension agent in King William County.

Sighting in on Squirrels

Expert tips for squirrel hunters in all seasons.

by Bruce Ingram



It's hard to beat good squirrel hunting. Above: photo by Bruce Ingram. Opposite: Gray squirrel; photo by Charles Schwartz.

Squirrels . . . Virginians can argue loud and long about these creatures. Some outdoorsmen scornfully label them as "tree rats." Others say that bushytails are challenging only for the novice hunter. But many if not most Old Dominion hunters look upon silvertails as fitting adversaries. It's not surprising then that state sportsmen go after them in a variety of ways. In short, squirrels can be hunted with a .22 rifle, a shotgun, and even with a .22 pistol and a dog. Depending on the season and the situation, each method can offer excellent sport.

Vernon Spencer, who hails from Endicott in Franklin County, has been hunting gray squirrels for almost 50 years. For certain situations, he feels a .22 rifle can't be beaten.

"In November when the leaves have fallen, I prefer to stand hunt for squirrels with a .22. I can't get close enough to them then to use a shotgun because they can see and hear me so far away."

Spencer also has tips on where to find squirrels.



"In September and early October, squirrels will be feeding on early hickories (pignuts) which have thin shells and are easy to crack open."

"But by early November," continues Spencer, "those nuts will be gone and the squirrels will be feeding on late hickories (shagbark) which have thicker shells."

Spencer says he will take a stand near some "late" hickories and listen intently for squirrels rustling about on the forest floor. If he doesn't find success among the shagbarks, he will look for white or red oak trees as a second choice. The Franklin County native usually ignores chestnut oaks because he feels that squirrels find these nuts bitter. Again, wherever he takes a stand, he takes his .22 rifle. This gun, which has superior range as compared to a shotgun, is best for long range shots through the late fall woods.

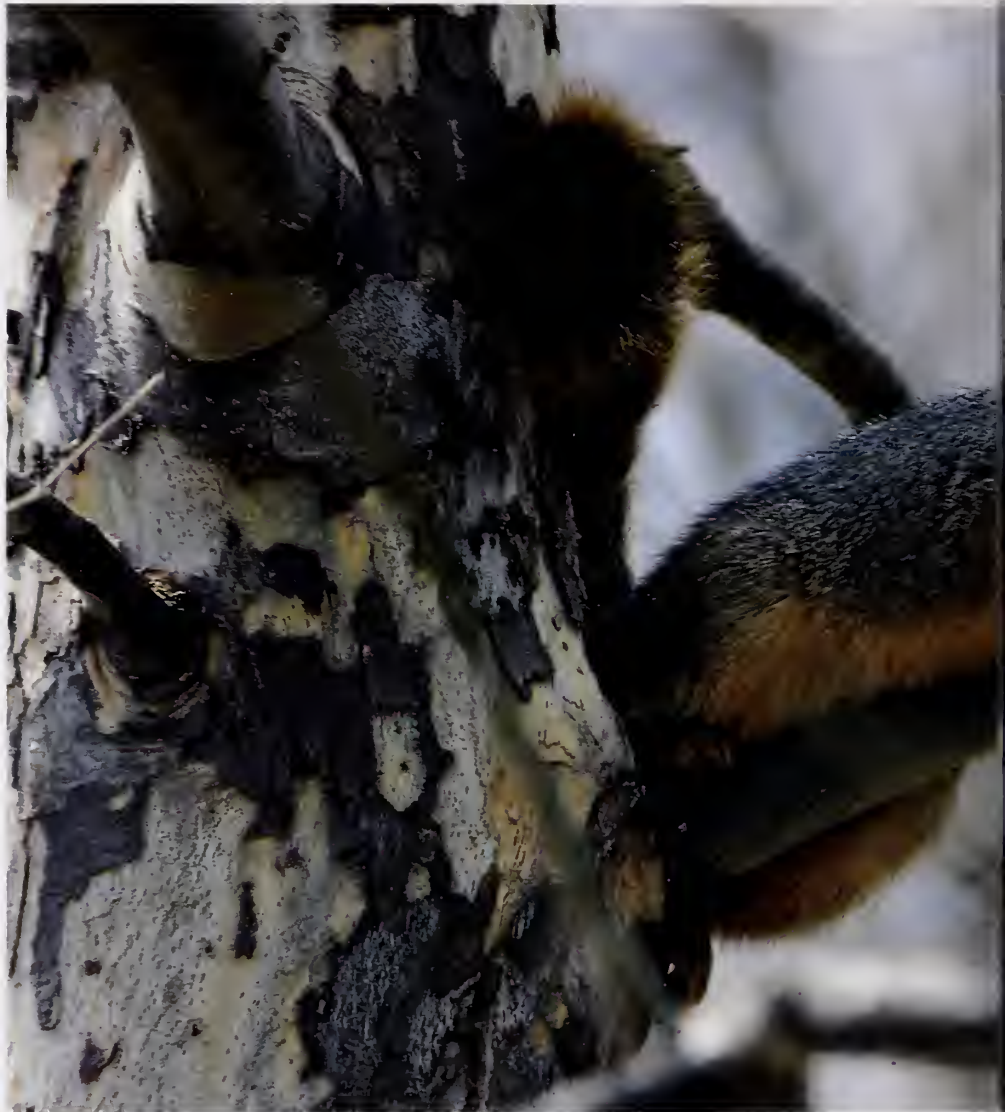
There are situations, however, where a .22 rifle is not as effective. Earlier in the season, a shotgun may be the best bet for Old Dominion sportsmen. Lacy All, owner-operator of the All Huntin'-N-Fishin Store in Salem, Virginia, has been hunting gray squirrels for 40 years and fox squirrels for the past 20. He explains why he uses a shotgun for early season action.

"In September and October, squirrels are moving through the trees more and the leaves still haven't fallen," says All. "You are going to get very few shots where you have a clear view of the entire animal. I don't know many people who can hit a moving squirrel with a .22 during that time of year. A shotgun throws out a wide pattern and gives you a much better chance of a quick kill."

All recommends a 20 gauge for early season fox and grays. He feels that gauge packs all the power needed for bushytails and is much quieter than 12 or 16's. He also uses number 6 shot instead of number 4's because he feels the latter tears up the meat too much.

All moves slowly and quietly through the post Labor Day woods, sometimes covering less than a mile of real estate in four hours or more of hunting. Though he hunts for both species of squirrels, the fox holds a special fascination for him.

The fox squirrel can be hunted only west of the Blue Ridge and in Fairfax,



An eastern fox squirrel has different habits than its grey relative: photo by Charles Schwartz.

Fauquier, Loudoun and Rappahannock. And, according to All, "A fox squirrel is a different kind of animal altogether than a gray squirrel. They are bigger, more 'talkative,' more aggressive, and much more curious than grays. On the other hand, I don't think they're as intelligent as grays are."

Gray and fox squirrels are easy to tell apart. The head and body of a gray is typically 8 to 10 inches long while the fox's is 10 to 15 inches in length. The former rarely weighs over 1 3/4 pounds while the latter sometimes goes 3 pounds. Grays, as you would expect, have a grayish color and an extremely "bushy" tail (thus the nickname) bordered with white tipped hairs. Foxes boast rusty-yellow bodies with light yel-

low to orange bellies. Their tails also have a tawny color.

The manner in which the two species "talk" also helps to distinguish them.

"Fox squirrels have more of a growl," says All. "They have a deeper, more 'raspy' voice as compared to a gray's bark. Once you hear a fox squirrel's growl, you won't ever get it confused with a gray's bark."

"For example," continues All, "if you come upon a fox squirrel and he 'walks' up a tree when he sees you, three or four minutes later he'll start yapping. They really like to run their mouths. If a gray spots you, he'll go behind a tree trunk and stay there. A fox will sometimes even try to circle around behind you through the trees.



"Fox squirrels are very curious and if a hunter takes that into account, it can give him an advantage. Sooner or later, a fox's curiosity will get the better of him and he'll show himself. Just wait him out and you'll get a chance at a shot."

Like Spencer, All favors hickories for gray squirrels as well as for fox squirrels. But while Spencer feels that grays avoid chesnut oaks, All believes that this variety of oak is one of a fox's favorite foods. Having hunted fox squirrels in Roanoke, Craig, and Montgomery counties, All believes they favor mature open woodlots with clearings interspersed. He also finds them along fence rows, edges of corn fields, and in walnut groves after the nuts have fallen.

Few Virginia hunters use a .22 pistol and a dog to hunt squirrels, but this method can be very productive under certain situations. Paul Calhoun, a freelance writer and photographer from Roanoke, hunts in this manner. He feels that in December and January, when squirrels may be more scattered in their search for food, a dog can be a real help. A good squirrel dog can cover a great deal of ground and eliminate territory that the outdoorsman alone would have wasted time on.

Among squirrel dog enthusiasts the argument has long raged over which is better—a scent hunter or a sight hunter. Calhoun puts his faith in the latter.

"My dog Zeke is a sight hunter," says Calhoun. "When he takes off, I know

he is after a squirrel and it is close. A squirrel will often try to stay on the other side of the tree from a dog. So I try to move in from an angle before the squirrel knows I'm there and hope for a clear shot."

The Roanoke photographer feels that a canine which hunts by scent can literally spend minutes barking up the wrong tree. Meanwhile, the elusive bushytail is long gone, having made its way through the treetops.

There also has been much disagreement over which breed makes the best squirrel dog. Some sportsmen state that fox and rat terriers make the best dogs—others claim that dogs of doubtful lineages are superior.

"I don't think mixed breeds necessarily beat pure breeds as squirrel dogs," says Calhoun. "It just depends on the individual dog more than anything else. Zeke is a mixed breed and he does well. I also have a Chesapeake Bay retriever that has an instinct for squirrels."

Calhoun also favors using a .22 pistol when working silvertails with Zeke. Though he freely acknowledges that .22 rifles and shotguns are excellent ways to take squirrels, a pistol does have advantages under certain situations.

"Late in the season when I have to walk a long way to find squirrels, I really like a .22 pistol," says Calhoun. "It's light and easy to carry and that's especially important if I'm carrying camera or camping gear."

"Plus, to me, hunting squirrels with a pistol requires a lot of shooting skill. It really emphasizes the marksmanship part of hunting. If I haven't had time to target practice, I'm really hesitant about going out. When I use a pistol for squirrels, I'm aiming only for the head. It's strictly either a clean hit or a clean miss—the game is rarely wounded."

There was one statement echoed by Spencer, All, and Calhoun. Their favorite reason for hunting squirrels is just to be out in the woods. Whether you go after busytails with a .22 rifle, a shotgun, a pistol and a dog, or some other way, that point is hard to disagree with. □

Bruce Ingram is the Virginia editor for Outdoor Life magazine and a frequent contributor to Virginia Wildlife.



Before You Hit the Woods

the essentials of bowhunting

by Charlie Kroll

Back in the 30's when I was a bowhunting novice, there was little available in the way of proper advice or instruction. I had to more or less learn the hard way. Nowadays we have the advantages of a great many experienced bowmen to turn to, plus a considerable number of publications that can help give the neophyte a proper head start.

Learning to shoot the bow and arrow is much easier than many people think; it sort of comes naturally, like throwing a ball or using a slingshot. Before hunting with the bow, however, there are some important considerations that are often overlooked by a beginner.

No serious archer will go afield at season's opening without having honed his shooting skill well ahead of time. Shooting field courses is fun and great for getting the muscles in shape, but it should not be construed as final before-the-hunt practice. The bowhunter needs to shoot broadheads, he needs to shoot at unknown distances, and he needs to shoot at game-like targets.

For hunting practice it is important to shoot at something other than a round target and one connected solidly with the ground, as field butts usually are. The visual connection between the two and the abnormal above-ground height can throw you off in the field and cause you to neglect the most important point in hunting—picking a tiny

Opposite: photo by Lynda Richardson.

spot to concentrate on, rather than aiming at the entire animal.

Silhouette targets are a fine solution for the serious bowhunter. They are made by sketching the rough outline of a deer or other game on heavy carton material, then cutting it out and either suspending it from a wire between two stakes, or tacking it to the stakes with large-headed roofing nails. The stakes represent the legs of the animal. These targets should be set up so they appear to be the animal's normal height. They should have no visible aiming spots, the idea being to train yourself to automatically pick a spot of concentration without having a bull's-eye to help you.

The newer 3-D animal targets made of plastic foam are also excellent, but are considerably more expensive to purchase or to make. In either case, shooting distances should be unmarked to allow for that all-important practice in judging distance. Uneven ground allowing for shots angled upslope and down is also helpful.

Another excellent form of bowhunting practice is the ancient English game of Rovers. It can be done alone, but a companion or two spices up the game considerably. All it requires is any shootable stretch of woodlands or tract

of unused land. Hilly or rolling terrain is excellent. The targets are picked at random—old stumps, pine cones, clumps of grass, or bare spots on a bank. If more than one archer is participating, the one who hits or comes closest to the target has the privilege of choosing the next mark. This game is not only fun but really develops your judgement of distance.

If you plan to hunt from an elevated stand, practice shooting down at silhouette targets from a flat-roofed garage, shed, stepladder, or something else 12 to 15 feet high. In shooting down, do not just lower the bow arm, but rather bend over at the waist to get the arms in proper alignment. Otherwise you will overshoot the target.

If you plan to hunt with a bowsight, some adjustment may be necessary, not because of the higher or lower trajectory, but because of the higher or lower head position which may change the distance between eye and nock end of the arrow. Needless to say, such adjustments should be worked out well ahead of time rather than waiting until the actual hunt to do so.

Game has a way of making an appearance when least expected, and the successful bowman is often one who is capable of shooting from the most awkward positions. Your practice should include shots from kneeling and sitting positions and with your body

twisted either right or left.

Shooting at fast-moving ground game is not generally recommended because of the difficulty in exact arrow placement. However, there are times when such a shot may be attempted as the game bolts by at close range. Here the archer, like the gunner, must swing with his target and use a lead. Practice for such a shot can be had by using old tire casings with carton material inserts in the centers. Rolled down a slope or across uneven ground, these make for challenging and enjoyable practice.

Incidentally, no matter how sharp you think you are, never stop practicing when hunting season begins. It takes daily shooting to keep the muscles, the eyes and the confidence in shape. Always shoot a few arrows to limber up before beginning a day's hunt, and again during a lunch break and just before leaving your blind or stand. The more limbered up and coordinated you are, the better your chance when opportunity finally comes.

There is a certain amount of luck connected with bowhunting, but the bowman who walks into an area on opening day for the first time that year, and heads home with a trophy after a few hours of hunting, is definitely the exception rather than the rule. The experienced hunter knows that luck is fickle and prefers solid knowledge as his hunting companion. Such knowledge includes the lay of the land and the habits of the game to be hunted. Even in an area well-known to the individual, habits of the animals may change from season to season, depending on climatic conditions and available food.

Scouting intended hunting areas before the season opens can determine where the game is most concentrated. For example, the deer's daily cycle includes movement from a bedding area to a watering area to a feeding area and back to a bedding area. Food preference and abundance are the nucleus of all deer movement patterns. By locating these areas and the travel zones connecting them, you can then place your blind or stand with much better odds for success.

Unless you already know, contact the Game Commission about the most utilized deer foods in your area, then go

An Expert Takes Aim



Wayne Lee Hopkins takes aim; photo by Steve Ausband.

Wayne Lee Hopkins of Danville has taken more deer with a bow than anybody else I know. At 63 years old, he has taken to the woods with a bow for the past 37 years.

"Some hunters go on a deer stand and don't notice anything," Hopkins muses. "So they don't learn anything. For a man who is willing to watch and pay attention to what he sees, there are always opportunities to learn about wildlife." From January through October, Hopkins scouts potential hunting areas, observing animals through binoculars, taking photographs, and examining sign. When the bow season rolls around, he is ready. Wayne Hopkins sees a lot of deer every year—more than most hunters I know, including those who travel to exotic places and spend exorbitant sums of money. And he is a successful hunter. Last year, when the state issued a special archery license, hunters in south-central Virginia could take a maximum of four deer. Hopkins used all his tags. With success like that, he sees no need to take trips outside Virginia.

Hopkins hunts from trees, as most of us do now. In the early years of bow hunting, however, he remembers that

even the idea of getting up in a tree and crouching there for hours, holding a bow and arrow, seemed outlandish. He remembers being photographed back in the 50's by a man who thought it noteworthy that he donned climbing spikes and went up trees in search of deer.

Hopkins uses no commercial masking scents or deer lure scents. He thinks their strong odors make game suspicious. He's in sharp disagreement with other successful bow hunters, some of whom swear by fox urine, some by skunk scent, others by the odor of a doe in heat. All these guys are my friends, and all of them kill deer, but Hopkins smells a heckuva lot better than the rest of them. He rubs cedar on his hands, crushing the needles for their pungent oil, and sticks small boughs in his pockets to carry up the tree with him. He says he has watched deer circle hunters who were wearing the masking scents. The animals would stalk suspiciously and cautiously in the general area of the hunters' stands but rarely make an appearance. He uses camouflage to cut down on the glare from polished bow limbs, but thinks movement, not color, spooks most deer which have already come within shooting range.

to the library and familiarize yourself with them. Well-traveled trails are of course good indicators, but even better are droppings, which are often easier to find than fresh tracks. Droppings are fresh if they are dark and shiny and can readily be crushed flat under your boot sole without crumbling.

Sketch a map of your hunting area and plot game sightings, good signs, feed areas, prevailing wind directions and good blind or stand spots. Notes can be added to this as the season progresses and can be helpful references for the season ahead.

Another important consideration prior to the hunt is a review of the land-use ethic. Each year millions of Americans venture into the woodlands and the ever-growing acreage of posted private lands bears testimony to the fact that many have little or no concept of ethical outdoor practices.

Since few of us own enough of the wide open spaces to hunt on, we spend our seasonal days on someone else's land. While there, adherence to a few rules of courtesy and good manners are in order.

Be sure you ask permission every time you hunt on private property. Although you may have been told you are welcome anytime, it is common courtesy to check in and let the owner know where and when you will be on his property. Just because you have been given permission to hunt, do not assume that allows you to bring a whole group of buddies along. One companion might be all right, but not a platoon.

A true sportsman will not hesitate to report to proper authorities anyone damaging property or littering. It might mean getting involved, but it is necessary if the future of the sport is to be preserved. Good manners in the field and keeping landowners happy is the best insurance against losing your valued hunting privileges.

Quality hunting may encompass many things, but the most important part is always up to you—your attitude and sense of responsibility. Hunting that emphasizes traditional skills, fair chase and proper conduct is always an experience of value. □

Charlie Kroll is the director of the Fred Bear Sports Club.

by Stephen Ausband



Bowhunting for deer during the early archery season is a disciplined, difficult sport—but it also has great rewards; photo by Lloyd Hill.

Bowhunting in Virginia has changed dramatically in the years since Wayne Hopkins started using archery tackle. In the first place, there are more bowhunters now; numerous archery clubs and field archery courses offer the novice a place to meet other hunters, get advice, and improve his shooting skills. There are far more deer in the state now, too, so the beginning hunter has a good chance of seeing game when he goes hunting.

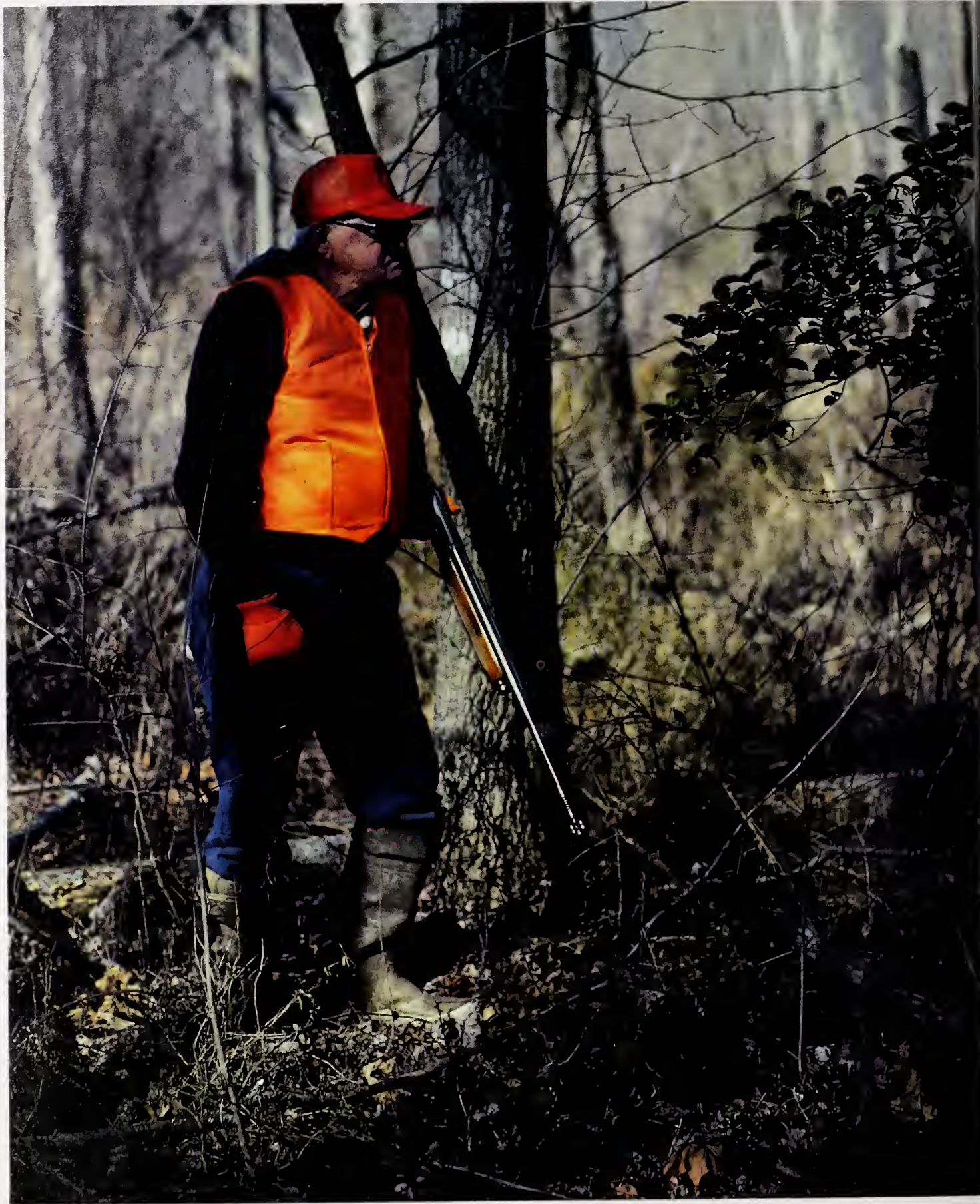
Perhaps the most radical changes, however, have been in equipment. The modern compound bow with sight pins is significantly easier to learn to use than the bare recurves and straight bow of 30 years ago, though even a compound is much more challenging than any firearm. Hopkins, who has hunted only for the past two seasons with a compound, having killed most of his deer with a 40-pound recurve bow, believes that the improvement in arrows is probably more significant than the advent of the compound bows.

"In the old days," he says, "all you could get were wooden arrows—if you could even get them. They were not very closely matched, simply because of the nature of the material. If you bought a dozen good arrows, six might shoot well out of the bow. The early

broadheads were heavy and prone to windplane. I used to make my own broadheads in order to get what I wanted. You didn't have the excellent selection you have today. Because the heads were so heavy, they wouldn't fly very well unless they were shot out of a very heavy bow—at least 50 pounds, maybe 65 or more. Given that combination, it was hard to get much accuracy without rigorous practice." Today's precisely matched aluminum arrows and lightweight, razor-sharp broadheads can help any bowhunter shoot more accurately. The modern equipment kills very quickly and humanely, too.

Wayne Hopkins has been refining his deer hunting techniques for 37 years. He has become such an enthusiastic bowhunter that his only gun hunting is for doves. But what about the rest of us? Why do people shell out money and spend time at the range and in the woods in order to become a "two-season hunter?" I don't think it is because we believe we might get a little extra venison for the freezer. It's because we love to bow hunt. □

Stephen Ausband is an English professor in Danville, and is a frequent contributor to Virginia Wildlife.





The Great Dilemma

What should we wear
in the woods?

by C.H. "Kit" Shaffer
photo by Harry Gillam

W

hat outfit should we wear when we go hunting in search of game? We now have numerous choices: traditional tans or brown canvas; camouflage greens, blacks or browns; bright red; blaze orange or a combination of all of them. Should our first priority be fully camouflaged outfits resulting in more successful game harvest or should we make concessions toward defensive hunting and safety by wearing clothing more visible to other sportsmen? The various types of hunting togs have caused numerous controversies and the debates continue. In some states, game regulatory agencies or legislatures have passed regulations requiring hunters to wear some form of bright protective clothing, but right now, at least, we in Virginia have the freedom to choose our own type of hunting garb.

Why the controversy? Tracing the evolution of hunting outfits might give us a clue. Four decades ago there were not as many individuals in the woods searching for deer, turkeys and other wildlife as there are today. Furthermore, there weren't as many white-tails

and gobblers out there for us to hunt. During those post depression days few of us had the extra funds to purchase special clothing just to go hunting. We usually sported a worn-out jacket of some description and a pair of ragged jeans or work pants. Gradually, as financial times improved, sporting goods manufacturers started making special jackets, pants and vests out of coarse, brown canvas-like materials.

Those outfits were and still are, effective against the elements and repelled the ever-present briars and thorns. They had numerous pockets to hold our shells, gloves, yelpers, lunches, drinks and other paraphernalia. Undoubtedly, the big advantage of these hunting outfits were that they lasted for a long time—they were extremely durable.

As the years progressed, hunting togs became more diversified, sophisticated and naturally more expensive. It became a mark of distinction to own a pair of hunting pants with legs that were faced with some type of leather, plastic or other repellent materials effective against briars. Hunting jackets also became more stylish, and often were manufactured two-toned and with shooting

pads on the shoulders. Game pockets were larger and lined with rubberized materials. Some of the more expensive outfits were made of Army pinks and garbardine materials in place of the traditional stereotyped brown canvas. It is significant, however, that sportsmen wearing old-time hunting outfits were successful in harvesting without wearing camouflage.

As the years progressed, though, camouflaged hunting outfits came into vogue. Undoubtedly the trend was a direct result of the experiences of our armed forces jungle fighting in the South Pacific. Returning veterans, recognizing the obvious advantage of the camo, started utilizing this effective type of hunting garb. Before we knew it, every conceivable type of outdoor outfit was being manufactured with camouflaged materials in the various blends and designs of greens, blacks and browns. Camo jackets, pants, parkas, hats, facemasks, boots, socks, handkerchiefs and jockey shorts became the standard mode of dress for many sportsmen.

Spring gobbler hunters especially adopted the camo outfits out of respect for a turkey's remarkable eyesight. Many gobbler chasers became so skilled at blending in with the springtime vegetation that they were difficult to see, even by their hunting companions. Hunting accidents, especially those of "mistaking" a hunter for game increased. The problem became bigger each season.

Because of the increase in the numbers of hunters in the woods and the difficulty of locating them, brilliant reds and blaze orange were incorporated into hunting outfits. It appears that the large majority of white-tail hunters now religiously wear red or blaze orange. They are, without a doubt, motivated by the will to survive. They apparently believe that deer, in contrast to turkeys, don't possess such amazing eyesight. Even back in the dark ages of deer hunting, I can recall sportsmen arriving on the first day of the season with red handkerchiefs or pieces of red cloth pinned on the backs of their hunting jackets or on their hats. They weren't being "chicken"—they just wanted to survive opening day mania.

In general then, the leading expo-

nents of camouflage outfits include dove, squirrel, waterfowl, and turkey hunters, as well as archers and primitive weapon enthusiasts. Rabbit and deer hunters appear to favor the bright reds and blaze orange.

The hunter outfit controversy is similar to other subjects where there are good arguments on both sides. We all realize how futile it is to argue with another individual whose mind is already made up. It is useless to debate religion, politics and automobiles. We can now add hunting outfits to that list.

We understand that the hunting outfit controversy has divided families, sportsmen's organizations and professionals in the conservation field. It has reached such proportions that recent sessions of the Virginia legislature have tackled the problem, and continue to do so each session.

I have been observing sportsmen conduct and studying wildlife in Virginia for almost 40 years. During that time I have hunted every game species and have killed game wearing every conceivable type of hunting garb. Allow me to recount some recent experiences with a camo-orange vest and to suggest some possible defensive hunting techniques which may prevent hunting accidents.



Several springtimes in the past, about 50 spring gobbler hunters were asked by the Virginia Game Commission to participate in an experiment. We were asked to wear a special orange vest on alternate mornings during the season. The vests provided were not brilliant blaze orange, but a dull variety with mottled black markings, a camo-orange. All of us in the experiment had certain reservations about wearing a non-traditional orange outfit to hunt the sharpest game species in the forest. However, I conscientiously gave the experiment my best shot and was able to call within gun range six adult gobblers. The procedure which I used was not complicated. As soon as I heard a gobbler, I set up in front of a large tree and tried not to move. I called up the gobblers as close to my location as possible. After they had departed the area, I paced off the exact closest dis-

tance that the toms had approached. True, I felt like a clown out there, and probably looked like a Christmas tree covered with neon lights, but I convinced myself that spring gobblers could be called in and harvested by hunters wearing camo-blaze orange.

I have always contended that turkeys are scared away primarily by movement rather than by colors. I must report, however, that the experiment was not conclusive. Many of the volunteers reported negative results; they felt that the orange vest prevented or reduced their chances of killing a gobbler.

The following autumn, when many more hunters were in the fields and woods, I continued wearing the camo-blaze orange vest. I hunt turkeys during the fall and winter season with a dog that ranges wide, attempting to locate and scatter flocks of the large game birds. While hunting with my dog, trying to locate turkeys, I wear blaze orange. After the turkeys are flushed, I build a blind, take off my camo-blaze orange vest and wrap it around a tree directly over the blind. In the past, I have called in a number of hunters sneaking through the woods with their guns in readiness, foolishly trying to stalk a turkey. The first season I attempted this technique, I was able to call up a total of 25 gobblers and hens with the orange vest overhead. Now, after four fall seasons of trials, I have not called in a single hunter and to my knowledge, have not scared any turkeys either. After all, aren't autumn turkeys accustomed to seeing their habitat alive with brilliantly colored leaves, including bright reds and oranges?

There are a number of important decisions which responsible and ethical sportsmen must make before going hunting. Where do we place our highest priorities? Can't we compromise and make some defensive hunting concessions by attempting to be more visible to other hunters? Shouldn't we emphasize the kill and bag limits less, and instead strive for safe, esthetic outdoor experiences with delightful companions? I think so. □

Retired Game Commission biologist and legendary turkey hunter, Kit Shaffer now lives in Lynchburg.

NATIONAL HUNTING & FISHING DAY®

Sept. 27,
1986

Hunting And Fishing Day Events

Below is a listing of the dates and locations of the events commemorating the 1986 National Hunting and Fishing Day. Mark your calendars, gather up the kids, and spend the afternoon doing the next best thing to a day in the field. Show your love for your sport. Be there.

Charlottesville—September 20
Fashion Square Mall

Lynchburg—September 20
River Ridge Mall

Northern Virginia—September 27
Manassas Mall

Roanoke—September 27
Tanglewood Mall

Winchester—September 27
Old Town Mall

Rocky Mount—September 27
Sportsmen's Rendezvous Event

Richmond—September 28
Izaak Walton Park

Portsmouth—September 27-28
Portsmouth City Park

From the Backcountry

21th Annual VWF Awards Banquet

The 21th Annual Virginia Wildlife Federation Awards Banquet will be held on October 18, 1986 at the Holiday Inn Mid-town in Richmond. The banquet begins at 6:00 p.m. and tickets are available for \$17 each and must be ordered in advance using the form below. Return your order and check (payable to VWF) to: VWF, 4602 West Grove Court, Virginia Beach 23455. (Hotel reservations should be made separately with the Holiday Inn.)

Virginia Wildlife Federation
21st Annual Awards Banquet
6:00 p.m. October 18, 1986
Holiday Inn Mid-town
3200 W. Broad St.
Richmond, Virginia 23230

My check for \$_____ is enclosed for _____ tickets at \$17.00 each. Make check payable to Virginia Wildlife Federation. *All tickets must be ordered by October 13.* No tickets will be sold at the door.

Name

Address

City

State, Zip

Leonard Lee Rue III To Speak

The Virginia Deer Hunters Association, Inc. is sponsoring a seminar by noted wildlife photographer, author and lecturer, Leonard Lee Rue III at Midlothian High School in Chesterfield County on Saturday, September 20 at 1 p.m. and 7 p.m. Rue, author of the best-selling book, *Deer of North America*, will present a seminar on the white-tailed deer. Admission is \$8 in advance, \$10 at the door, and \$6 for youths 17 years and under. Tickets are available from the Virginia Deer Hunters Association, P.O. Box 34746, Richmond, VA 23234-0746. □

Letters

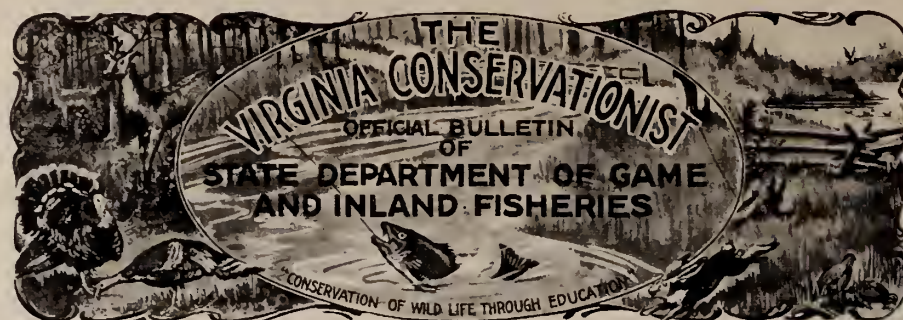
July Editorial

I too, can not understand why "people" leave their wastes behind—while on a fishing trip, out of Murrells Inlet, S.C. I was so disturbed to see all the litter that was thrown overboard, I was compelled to write the Governor of South Carolina. I did receive a thank-you-for-writing reply and a promise to contact the "Fleet" at Murrells Inlet to try and help the litter problem.

I challenge every reader of your magazine to write their government leaders of this growing problem and try to make the litter laws stronger to help keep not only Virginia cleaner but our whole Universe.

You can bet your bottom dollar, if you had of told the young man "so," your boat would have probably sank!

Mary Ruth Compton
Martinsville



“Be Real Sports Now”

The constructive power of Virginia's press in wildlife conservation is inestimable. We are reproducing an editorial in the *Suffolk News* which was copied in full in the *Southwest Times*. Through our exchanges we note the doctrine of wildlife conservation is being preached in nearly all of our weekly and daily papers. This is the kind of education which will do more than all of the restrictive laws in effecting real wildlife conservation.

The editorial from the *Suffolk News* follows:

“Virginia has been making a heroic endeavor at large expense to save the wild game of the forest as well as the fish in her streams, and despite the pot hunters and thoughtless and wilful violators of the law, is seeing the result of the efforts put forth. Still game of all kinds is near the vanishing point and unless huntsmen are real sports and comply with the law in every particular all that has and is being done will be nullified. The gunner should bear in mind that all this effort has not been put forth for him alone because game birds and wild animals are loved for themselves and not for sport only by some people. Partridges and many other birds are allies of the farmers, rendering vast assistance in saving crops from destructive insects.

“The gunner should cooperate by all

fair means in saving the denizens of the forest that they may not at some near future be decimated. Care should be taken not to exceed the bag limit and to see that others do not. Sport is one thing and butchery of game for the love of killing is another. There is just as much sport in chasing one rabbit half a day before he is bagged or one covey of birds before the limit is killed as there is in slaying hundreds. It was sheer ruthlessness that has made the wild game of the woods almost rare in some instances.

“The hunting season is now open and the sportsmen are going gayly and blithely to the distant haunts of the feathered tribe. They should be careful not to kill the last of a covey or to exceed the limit that law and common sense have fixed. By observing the law and using judgement the gunners are assuring a more bountiful supply of game next year and the next. Our forests are disappearing and wild game will grow less and less in proportion to the loss of cover. It will require care and good judgement to keep all kinds of game from becoming extinct. Sanctuaries should be respected and guarded and no game should be killed out of season as a matter of course. No real sportsmen will violate the law and they should see to it that others are compelled to respect it. That alone will keep the hunting grounds stocked with game for the delight of the sportsmen and those who love those creatures for themselves.” □

The Game Hog

By Hon. Alvah Clapp

The game hog is a hunter who knows no such thing as conscience in the shooting of game. He respects not its mating and nesting seasons and is regardless of its scarcity or its struggle for existence. He will kill the full legal bag limit every day he hunts if he can do so, and then probably sneak a few for the dog. He will use any kind of pump or automatic gun, continue shooting as long as the birds are in sight, and he knows no such thing as giving the birds a square deal. He always shoots into the center of a flock or covey in the hope of getting three or four birds at one shot, and is wholly oblivious as to how many birds he cripples. He delights to be photographed with a wagon-load of game, and he dearly loves dead birds as a background. He believes in spring shooting, longer open seasons, more game and can see no reason why all the game in the world should not be killed and marketed.

But the real sportsman who has had a fine day's outing can fill his day and his soul's desire with a half dozen birds just as well as twenty-five or fifty. To slaughter a wheelbarrow load of game is a mistaken idea. One live quail on a fence today is worth more to humanity than twenty dead ones in a bloody sack. □



Book Review

by Jeff Curtis

A Handful of Thumbs and Two Left Feet
by Sam Venable
The Knoxville News - Sentinel Co.,
Inc.,
Knoxville, Tenn.
\$7.95

If you receive a magazine called *Waterfowler's World*, then you're probably acquainted with Sam Venable. He writes the last page article, "One Shy of a Limit." If you're not, then you're missing out.

May I introduce Mr. Sam Venable, the Venable, Venob (as he calls himself in Louisiana cajun dialect).

I predict that soon Sam Venable will become as familiar to you Mr. Reader, as fellow outdoor writers, Gene Hill, Ed Zern, Jim Rikhoff and Zack Taylor. Now I'm putting money down on that last statement. If *A Handful of Thumbs and Two Left Feet* is a collection of Venob's writing ability, then I want to see more.

The first 14 or so stories are some of the funniest pieces on outdoor haps and mishaps you'll ever read. Take, for example, the following narration of a nighttime bass outing on Fort Loudoun Lake:

"It's straight up midnight as we lope back into open water from the houseboat. Pull into first fisherman-less bank we see. It is a dark bank, covered with shadows. Two dozen Canada geese, snoozing on shore, erupt in a feathered volcano and roar out over our heads. McK. and I say to one another in uni-

son, 'Prithee, what can be causing such a horrendous and frightening noise?' Or words to that effect.

Cast for bass diligently until 3 a.m. Catch one fish, a drum of about two pounds.

On final bank, I turn in seat to cast. Hang lure on stern light. Throw ostrich-sized bird's nest into casting reel.

And that, kind reader, is when it happened.

That's when all the blown fuses and floating driftwood and crowded conditions and rude fishermen and cut noses and geese that come honking out of the dark and everything else on this hateful, horrid night came crashing home.

I shall not tell you what series of epithets were bellowed at the top of my lungs. Suffice to say 40 families living along the shores of Fort Loudoun Lake bolted straight awake. And ran to see if their Red Ryder lunch boxes were still intact.

The next morning, I related the miseries to Mary Ann, who flowed with soothing compassion.

'Why, fool, do you punish yourself by fishing all night?'

I gagged on my coffee and spit up toast. A blue vein bulged in my neck.

'Why?' I shouted. 'Why!?!?'

'Can't you see it helps me relax?' "

A Handful of Thumbs and Two Left Feet will make you laugh. But perhaps one of the book's most memorable accolades is a sad tribute to a less than three-year-old boy, long deceased, in "Johnie Maney." Here, Venable is talking to Johnie Maney's tiny headstone, dated December 4, 1902-October 6, 1905. He's really talking to the boy himself, musing over the surrounding wild turkey country, the other graves on the ridgetop site and the hardships that Johnie Maney's people must have endured at the turn of the century. This story will get to you. It'll get right to your soft spot. And, unless you're not ashamed of shedding some evidence of emotion, I wouldn't suggest reading it in public.

In the book, Venable describes his first introduction to the late Bob Burch. Burch, well-known among state fish and game agencies as a pioneer wildlife educator, especially with children, had considerable impact on Venable's career.

His opening sentence of the chapter dedicated to Burch equates outdoor writers with "craftsmen." I like that. For my dollar, Sam Venable holds the distinction of being included on his own list of craftsmen.

I'm getting ready to reread *A Handful of Thumbs and Two Left Feet*. Venable has an honest, clean, sincere style. This book is refreshing and one I'd like to share with you.

My highest regards, Mr Venable. □

Trophy Contest Dates Set

The Eastern Regional Championship of Virginia's Big Game Trophy Contest will be held on September 26 and 27 this year, followed by the Western Regional and Virginia State Championships on October 10 and 11.

The Eastern Regional Championship will be held on September 26 from noon to 9 p.m. and September 27th beginning at 9 a.m. An awards cere-

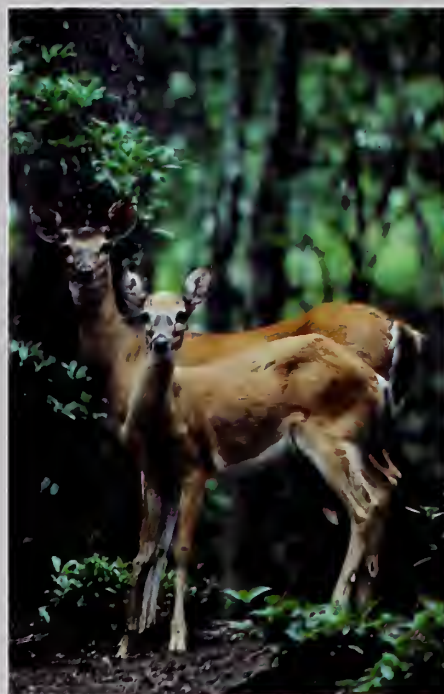
mony is scheduled for 6 p.m. *The entry deadline is noon on September 27.* Location: Julius Conn Gymnasium in downtown Newport News, on 29th Street between Huntington Avenue and Warwick Boulevard. For more information, contact: Charles A. Rogers, President, Virginia Peninsula Sportsmen's Association, Inc., P.O. Box 1933, Newport News, VA 23601, 804/873-8448.

The Western Regional and State Championships will take place at the Rockingham County Fairgrounds on U.S. 11, 1.6 miles south of exit 62 off I-81 in Harrisonburg. *The entry deadline is noon on October 11.* For more information, contact: Boyd E. Skelton, Rockingham-Harrisonburg Chapter, Izaak Walton League of America, 412 North Main Street, Bridgewater, VA 22812, 703/828-3393.

Entry Requirements: All entries must have been bagged in Virginia with a legal sporting weapon during the 1985-86 hunting season. Game bagged east of the Blue Ridge must be entered in the Eastern Regional Contest. Game bagged west of the Blue Ridge must be entered in the Western Regional Contest. Scores will be determined using the Virginia scoring system: **Deer:** Antler measurements will determine score. **Bear:** Submit skull, including lower jaw bone, for scoring. **Turkey:** Submit feet, including spurs, beard, and the wild turkey weight certification tag. Each entry must be accompanied by its Virginia Big Game check tag. Absolutely no exceptions will be allowed.

Virginia Big Game Citations will also be awarded at each contest. Minimum score for citations are: Bear: 20, Deer: 140, Turkey: 50. Bear, deer and turkey must be entered in the appropriate regional contest to be officially scored for the citation as well as for the regional championship.

The 47th annual contest is sponsored by the Virginia Commission of Game and Inland Fisheries, the Virginia Peninsula Sportsmen's Association, Inc., and the Rockingham-Harrisonburg Chapter of the Izaak Walton League of America. □



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turkey, raccoon, doves, and rabbits.

Havens Wildlife Management Area—7,158 acres in Roanoke County. Foot access only. Bear, deer, grouse, raccoon, squirrel and turkey.

Hidden Valley Wildlife Management Area—6,400 acres in Washington County. Grouse, rabbit, squirrel, deer, turkey, bear, and raccoon.

Highland Wildlife Management Area—13,977 acres in Highland County. Bear, deer, grouse, raccoon, squirrel, and turkey.

Hog Island Waterfowl Management Area—3,907 acres in Surry County. Bowhunting for deer during early archery season. Managed waterfowl hunting. Fee hunting area. Advance fee reservation required.

Horsepen Lake Wildlife Management Area—2,688 acres (18-acre lake) in Buckingham County. Deer, turkey, squirrel, quail and grouse.

James River Wildlife Management Area—671 acres in Nelson County. Deer, squirrel, rabbit, raccoon, turkey, quail, dove, and waterfowl.

Little North Mountain Wildlife Management Area—17,538 acres in Augusta and Rockbridge counties. Bear, deer, grouse, raccoon, squirrel and turkey.

Mockhorn Island Wildlife Management Area—9,452 acres in Northampton County. Rail and limited waterfowl. Accessible by boat only.

Pettigrew Wildlife Management Area—934 acres in Caroline County. Deer, squirrel, rabbit and quail.

Powhatan Wildlife Management Area—4,171 acres in Powhatan County. Deer, squirrel, turkey, raccoon, rabbit, quail and dove.

Ragged Island Wildlife Management Area—1,536 acres in Isle of Wight County. Waterfowl.

Rapidan Wildlife Management Area—8,882 acres in Madison and Green counties. Bear, deer, grouse, squirrel and turkey.

Saxis Wildlife Management Area—5,275 acres in Accomack County. Rail and waterfowl.

Turkeycock Mountain Wildlife Management Area—1,789 acres in

Franklin County. Deer, grouse and squirrel.

White Oak Mountain Wildlife Management Area—2,711 acres in Pittsylvania County. Deer, quail, rabbit, squirrel, raccoon, grouse and dove.

Hunting Laws

Hunting seasons and bag limits are set by the Game Commission and some are modified from year to year as changes in game habitat conditions, game populations, hunting pressure, and other factors dictate. A few specific (mostly local) laws have been enacted by the General Assembly, and are changed infrequently. In some cases, counties have been delegated authority to adopt local ordinances relating to use of rifles and shotgun slugs, firearms safety zones, and hunting in public places (such as along roads). It is crucial to refer to the Game Laws Summary for these county variances.

The "Summary of Virginia Game Laws," is brought up to date and published each year around the first of July, and is distributed through license agents and sporting goods outlets throughout the state.

Hunting Calendar

September This is the beginning of hunting season for most sportsmen. Migratory bird (dove and rail) seasons open, as do early squirrel seasons in some counties.

October More early squirrel seasons open (and close) in a number of counties. Early bow hunting begins, as do regular deer and bear seasons in Dismal Swamp and hunting on commercial shooting preserves. The early duck season opens.

November This is the big month. Quail hunting opens early in the month. General deer season opens the third Monday of the month, and bear season

a week later. Rabbit, squirrel, turkey and grouse hunting also opens. The federal guidelines for waterfowl season usually opens its second segment beginning the end of this month.

December This is a winding down month, as seasons begin to close, although the second segment of a split dove season usually comes in shortly before Christmas, as well as the third segment of the general duck season.

January Most remaining seasons close during or at the end of January, except for quail and raccoon seasons east of the Blue Ridge.

February By the end of February, most hunting is over until spring.

April-May A spring turkey (gobbler only) season is open from about mid-April to mid-May. Specific dates are set annually, about a year in advance.

Summer This is ground hog hunting season. There is no closed season on the species, but hunting and trespass laws do apply.

Methods

Deer Western counties are synonymous with rifles and stand hunting or stalking. In eastern counties, hunting with dogs is most common and the shotgun with buckshot the popular firearm.

Bear A traditional Virginia bear hunt involves a good many hunters, and a pack of specially bred and trained bear hounds. Some bear are taken by hunting quietly and alone, but it happens as much by chance or accident as by design.

Squirrels These are our most sought-after small game species. Preferred method is taking a stand near mast-producing trees early in the morning or late in the afternoon, when squirrels are "cutting" hickory, walnuts, acorns or pine cones. Late in the season, when foliage is at a minimum, dogs that will tree squirrels sometimes are used effectively. Firearms range from .22 caliber rifles to full-choke shotguns.

Turkeys Our Virginia spring turkey hunting season goes back only to about 1960. The spring gobbler hunter

Statewide Deer, Bear, and Fall Turkey Harvest

tries to locate a gobbling tom by imitating the occasional yelps of a hen. In the fall, the idea is to flush a "gang," then call back the scattered young birds by imitating the "kee-kee run" call of the hen.

Rabbits Second only to squirrels, rabbits are the mainstay of Virginia small game animals. Using a couple of voiciferous and hard-working beagles, the rabbit provides an exciting hunt for both youngsters and adults.

Quail "Bird hunting" as it is referred to in all southern states is truly a gentleman's sport. Old, small-bore doubles, fine setters and pointers and second growth cut-overs all represent the hunt for the bobwhite. Although some quail are taken without dogs standing them, the staunch pointing bird dogs are almost essential for a successful bird hunt.

Grouse Hill climbing and brush busting in rugged terrain describes the Virginia grouse hunt. Dogs are often used to find and flush grouse. Since grouse do not hold well, a slow, close hunting dog is generally preferable to a fast, wide-ranging individual.

Doves Recently harvested grain fields in Piedmont and Tidewater Virginia attract concentrations of doves in the afternoons. As the doves fly into a field to glean whatever waste grain there may be, hunters take stands around the borders where safe shooting may yield a harvest of this rapid flying bird.

Waterfowl There are several waterfowl hunting methods that fit distinct hunting situations. Most common is shooting over decoys from a blind erected on stakes offshore, or against natural vegetation in a marsh. Floating blinds are also used. Floating down inland streams and "jump shooting" is generally the way it is done west of the I-95 highway corridor. Hiking back to beaver ponds where one stands, usually in boots or waders, hidden by natural vegetation, and watches for mallards and wood ducks is also popular. In all cases, a trained retriever is an important member of the hunting party. Not only is he a dependable companion, but also helps prevent the loss of cripples.

County	1983 — 1984			1984 — 1985			1985 — 1986		
	Deer	Bear	Turkey	Deer	Bear	Turkey	Deer	Bear	Turkey
Accomack	359	0	0	316	0	8	525	0	0
Albemarle	1,457	35	247	1,212	32	171	1,703	15	214
Alleghany	1,374	13	329	1,364	20	226	1,856	15	265
Amelia	2,270	0	331	1,862	0	193	1,729	0	164
Amherst	881	5	180	921	14	189	996	13	213
Appomattox	594	0	208	506	0	152	558	0	183
Augusta	1,957	26	245	2,336	48	221	2,852	47	201
Bath	2,772	12	361	2,843	11	362	3,725	16	400
Bedford	1,673	16	338	1,911	16	275	2,197	21	309
Bland	1,017	4	198	1,144	5	222	1,279	9	190
Botetourt	1,631	25	280	1,629	28	263	1,638	31	233
Brunswick	1,507	0	167	1,463	0	148	1,649	0	195
Buchanan	6	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0
Buckingham	1,988	0	366	1,530	0	267	1,640	0	257
Campbell	310	0	150	323	0	99	335	0	134
Caroline	1,998	0	312	1,302	0	231	1,745	0	291
Carroll	359	0	147	413	0	149	524	0	183
Charles City	830	0	40	1,079	0	5	1,572	0	14
Charlotte	869	0	177	689	0	146	967	0	125
Chesapeake	311	8	0	302	6	0	258	5	0
Chesterfield	1,549	0	89	1,155	0	31	945	0	50
Clarke	414	0	35	427	0	25	456	0	36
Craig	1,520	6	226	1,529	12	168	1,739	13	183
Culpeper	559	0	85	557	0	70	779	0	105
Cumberland	1,401	0	264	1,199	0	174	1,348	0	153
Dickenson	17	0	6	0	0	0	0	0	0
Dinwiddie	1,339	0	214	1,082	0	168	1,340	0	163
Essex	244	0	36	254	0	45	213	0	45
Fairfax	116	1	0	96	0	0	148	0	2
Fauquier	1,383	0	115	1,543	0	80	1,801	0	68
Floyd	318	0	71	413	0	53	545	0	83
Fluvanna	1,109	0	240	804	0	150	807	0	162
Franklin	719	0	157	921	0	145	1,025	0	145
Frederick	1,186	0	149	1,232	0	102	1,450	0	147
Giles	1,094	26	261	1,494	16	301	1,784	12	198
Gloucester	234	0	0	218	0	0	281	0	0
Goochland	1,008	0	166	744	0	118	803	0	121
Grayson	1,730	0	153	2,388	0	163	2,884	1	184
Greene	106	10	26	106	9	32	195	11	24
Greensville	712	0	10	721	0	10	1,245	0	7
Halifax	1,165	0	208	930	0	199	1,198	0	245
Hampton-									
Newport News (city)	280	1	3	288	0	0	126	0	0
Hanover	455	0	164	330	0	64	454	0	79
Henrico	553	0	18	406	0	18	499	0	9
Henry	292	0	26	346	0	19	397	0	37
Highland	1,658	7	157	1,919	8	195	2,617	11	195
Isle of Wight	994	0	1	1,216	0	0	1,383	1	0
James City	433	0	2	338	0	0	431	0	0
King & Queen	627	0	111	602	0	111	855	0	108
King George	835	0	0	587	0	0	664	0	0
King William	700	0	174	632	0	107	650	0	117
Lancaster	357	0	1	311	0	0	428	0	0
Lee	180	0	13	160	0	20	217	0	28
Loudoun	1,513	0	85	1,688	0	57	2,137	0	43
Louisa	942	0	236	644	0	123	933	0	159
Lunenburg	811	0	100	675	0	69	856	0	86
Madison	203	10	33	258	31	13	287	25	28
Mathews	62	0	0	61	0	0	96	0	0
Mecklenburg	738	0	9	636	0	4	636	0	17
Middlesex	136	0	7	83	0	10	91	0	6
Montgomery	596	14	138	777	10	127	816	10	91
Nelson	821	22	165	690	39	122	670	30	115
New Kent	816	0	63	690	0	20	1,490	0	36
Northampton	137	0	0	182	0	0	321	0	0
Northumberland	386	0	0	301	0	0	384	0	0
Nottoway	1,275	0	132	951	0	75	1,199	0	96
Orange	428	0	58	354	0	35	536	0	53
Page	502	14	69	503	28	50	616	29	57
Patrick	535	0	40	542	0	38	573	0	37
Pittsylvania	1,654	0	143	1,634	0	138	1,838	0	189
Powhatan	1,556	0	209	1,270	0	111	1,387	0	97
Prince Edward	1,164	0	206	984	0	155	1,296	0	145
Prince George	830	0	107	916	0	60	1,017	0	52
Prince William	659	0	59	559	0	49	474	0	23
Pulaski	561	1	141	589	0	112	715	1	90
Rappahannock	931	14	82	1,173	20	81	1,050	13	42
Richmond	471	0	0	394	0	0	459	0	0
Roanoke	248	0	65	238	0	21	218	0	17
Rockbridge	1,372	8	263	1,619	25	329	1,735	46	244
Rockingham	2,485	47	123	2,522	45	100	3,287	58	138
Russell	70	2	9	86	1	16	99	2	25
Scott	180	0	25	231	0	26	286	0	56
Shenandoah	2,115	11	145	2,085	11	119	2,556	11	151
Smyth	742	0	97	879	1	133	1,081	2	122
Southampton	3,032	0	4	3,655	0	0	3,932	0	0
Spotsylvania	659	0	104	422	0	73	647	0	88
Stafford	499	0	95	401	0	48	537	0	36
Suffolk	945	2	2	1,107	8	0	1,237	13	0
Surry	1,068	0	0	1,209	0	0	1,947	0	0
Sussex	1,226	0	71	1,523	0	50	2,291	0	41
Tazewell	240	9	67	239	3	55	242	5	50
Virginia Beach (city)	241	0	0	200	0	0	205	0	0
Warren	824	9	73	879	16	74	926	5	38
Washington	270	2	57	252	0	35	339	0	44
Westmoreland	328	0	1	333	0	0	442	0	0
Wise	110	0	35	118	0	32	149	0	46
Wythe	961	3	198	1,037	3	149	1,283	3	199
York	947	0	25	700	0	9	641	0	3
Totals	85,739	363	10,801	84,382	467	8,613	101,412	474	9,025

Hunting Season Outlook 1986-87

by Bob Duncan, Assistant Chief Game Division

With no change in the game regulations or season limits from last year, the 1986-87 hunting season is shaping up to be one of the best ever. Abundant mast crops, mild winter weather, good to excellent game populations and liberal regulations should add up to excellent hunting opportunities for Old Dominion hunters this year.

1985 Deer Wrap-Up

While a record harvest was predicted in last year's forecast, the reported kill of 101,412 was higher than anticipated. Game Division biologists were predicting a total white-tailed deer harvest last year of 95,000 or 96,000 deer. However, a last minute change in the number of days during which the antlerless deer tag could be used resulted in a harvest in some areas which surpassed early predictions. Almost two-thirds of the statewide deer kill came from east of the Blue Ridge Mountains with a count of 63,498. West of the Blue Ridge accounted for 37,914 deer. The new record amounts to a statewide increase of 20 percent over last year and a 15 percent increase over the previous state record set in 1982. The 16,980 deer increase was comprised of 7,758 antlered bucks and 9,222 antlerless deer, including 7,335 does and 1,887 button bucks. The 1985-86 season marked the first time in recent years that both east and west of the Blue Ridge reported record deer kills during the same season (up 19 and 21 percent respectively).

The increased archery harvest also contributed to the successful season. Approximately 50,000 bowhunters purchased the new special archery license which offered an additional two deer bag limit. As a result, bowhunters established a record bow kill of 5,060 deer, up 2,348 (87 percent) over the previous season. The bulk of this harvest was taken west of the Blue Ridge. Grayson County, noted for deer hunt-

ing in the southwest, tallied 324 deer. Rockingham followed with 311 and Shenandoah with 230 deer. While the bowhunting harvest climbed this season, the total archery kill accounted for only five percent of other statewide deer kill.

Another major factor resulting in a planned increase in the deer kill was the addition of a second doe day in those counties west of the Blue Ridge formerly with a single doe day. In many of these western counties, however, poor weather on the second doe day resulted in a total doe kill for the season that only averaged approximately 30 percent of the total deer kill.

1986 Deer Forecast

Gary Spiers, Game Biologist Supervisor for the northwestern part of the state, reported that record harvests were established for 12 out of 23 counties in his region. He has indicated that prospects for deer hunting in 1986 are very good with results expected to equal or exceed last year's kill. Game Biologist Supervisor Mack Walls, is also looking for about the same type of season in southwestern Virginia this coming fall. Walls and Game Division personnel in his region are responsible for the deer hunting program at the Radford Army Ammunition Plant in Pulaski County which produced many fine trophy bucks last year and Walls reports that the hunts should go even better in the second year of operation.

In the East, primarily in the Tidewater section, does averaged about 41 percent of the total deer kill. Sussex and York counties reported the highest percentage of does at 51 and 52 percent, respectively. Greensville and Surry counties recorded 46 percent does and Suffolk followed with 45 percent and Southampton tallied with 43 percent. Charles City, Lancaster, New Kent, and Northampton also experienced increased doe kills with the percentages

ranging from 44 to 47 percent. A good harvest was needed in many areas to reduce total deer numbers. Now a better buck to doe ratio should result with better quality deer.

Fax Settle, our Game Biologist Supervisor for the eastern region of the state, is anticipating that the 1986-87 season will produce results similar to last year. If anything, Settle predicts that the counties north of the James River in his region may harvest slightly more deer and that Biologist Don Schwab's district in southeastern Virginia may kill slightly fewer.

Some counties like Chesterfield and Amelia experienced a decrease in kill this year as a result of the reduction in the number of doe days. However, other counties like Appomattox, King William, and Prince George showed an increase in total kill even though the number of doe days was reduced. These counties and others experienced changes in the number of doe days to allow for herd increases in some areas. Harvest in these areas for the 1986-87 season should remain at the same level.

The deer harvest in the central Piedmont last year established a record for biologist Hal Myers' district and was above the previous season total in Johnny Redd's district. Supervising Biologist Harold Trumbo reports that desired harvest levels were achieved in all counties except those with the shorter two-week season in the western portion of his region. Trumbo is not expecting any major changes from last season except for those which might be caused by bad weather and lack of hunting pressure.

Black Bear

Last year's reported harvest of 474 bears exceeded the previous record set the year before by seven animals. Sixty-nine percent of the bear kill came from west of the Blue Ridge, which experienced a 12 percent increase (35 more bears) over last year's tally. Last season's leading counties included Rockingham (58), Rockbridge (46), Nelson (30), Page (29), Madison (25) and the counties of Rappahannock and Suffolk with 13 each.

Jerry Blank, a Game Division Biologist Aide and trapper, has received fewer complaints concerning bear damage to crops and beehives this summer. Dennis Martin, the research biologist charged with keeping track of the bear data, believes that the 1986 season outlook is excellent and would not be surprised to see the harvest exceed 400 animals again next year.

Fall Turkey Season

While the harvest of 9,025 turkeys last fall represented an improvement over last year by 394 birds or five percent, the season harvest was still the second lowest in the past six years. Poor nesting success and survival resulted in fewer birds available this past fall and the abundant mast crop kept birds widely dispersed. Generally, the turkey hunting last season was better in the western part of the state. Preliminary observations appear good for a season comparable or better than last year.

Spring Turkey Season

Last year's spring gobbler season prediction proved wrong and we're glad, because we ended up with a new record harvest of bearded birds. While a new record, the actual increase over last spring amounted to a total of 5,767 compared to 5,658 in the spring of 1985. While the eastern turkey hunters experienced a drop in the total turkey kill, down five percent, the western hunters enjoyed an increase of 16 percent and added 296 more birds to the previous year's total. Prospects for the spring of 1987 appear good to excellent.

Squirrel

The 1985 oak mast rating was the highest statewide average acorn count ever made! The western portion of the state produced an excellent hard mast crop and the east was rated good. This spells good news for squirrel hunters statewide. Good squirrel populations tend to follow good mast years and based on last year's mast crop, the squirrel population should rebound to the point where bushytails are most plentiful. If you're thinking about buy-

ing a squirrel rifle or a good squirrel dog, this is the year.

Rabbit

What can you say about rabbits? According to one of our biologists (who shall remain nameless), "They're *hare* today and gone tomorrow!" Rabbits do have a way of becoming scarce by changing their habitat usage and seeking thicker cover. Conditions favorable to rabbits should mean that more cottontails will be found by beagles and brush-busting hunters this season.

Quail

Irvin Kenyon, Wildlife Management Area Supervisor from Sperryville, reports that Virginia quail hunters experienced improved hunting success across much of the state last fall and winter. As usual, the Tidewater, central and southern Piedmont regions produced the best bobwhite hunting. Quail rearing success, based on the percentage of juveniles in the fall populations, showed a slight increase over the previous season. Kenyon advises that while mid-summer predictions are difficult to make, the early forecast looks good. Kenyon expects some continued improvement in quail hunters success where habitat can support more birds. The 1985 farm bill program's set aside program should help produce more small game habitat.

Ruffed Grouse

Joe Coggin, Supervising Research Biologist, is the project leader for research studies dealing with the ruffed grouse. Making use of both 1985-86 season grouse wing collections and 1986 spring drumming counts, Coggin predicts a good grouse hunting season for the upcoming fall. The percent of juveniles in the harvest was slightly better than the production figures for last season which was the best in 10 years. Also, Coggin and other Game Division personnel heard a 44 percent increase in the number of drumming grouse this spring over the number heard in the spring of 1985. Unless the hatch and survival of young birds is greatly reduced from last year, we can expect a good season for grouse.

Waterfowl

According to Fax Settle, the Commission's representative to the Atlantic Flyway Technical Session, last year's early four-day October duck hunting segment was very poor in most areas. Wood ducks were noticeably low in numbers not only in Virginia but throughout the entire Southeastern U.S. Even the November-January season segments were generally poor to fair with the exception of certain stretches of the Rappahannock, Chickahominy, James and Pamunkey rivers, which experienced some of the best duck hunting in recent years. Mild weather and a shortage of birds caused by poor water and habitat condition on the prairies are believed to be the primary cause of the generally poor fall flight.

The 1986-87 fall flight forecast calls for improved numbers of ducks over last year's record low. However, breeding ground data indicate that overall numbers of Canada geese, greater snow geese, tundra swans and brandt will be reduced from last year.

Woodcock

Research Supervisor Jack Gwynn reports that in the 1985-86 season the average number of woodcock bagged per hunter participating in a woodcock wing survey remained unchanged at 16 birds per season. However, the number of woodcock taken per hunt declined slightly for Virginia hunters. With an overall low population and restrictive regulations, prospects for hunting the American woodcock this fall are at best considered only fair.

Mourning Dove

Dove call-count route data collected by Commission personnel in the spring revealed a slight increase in the average number of mourning doves heard cooing per route. While dove production appears good at this point, the influence of weather on crop development will affect the quality of dove hunting this fall. With drought conditions in many of the eastern areas of the state, corn and other grain crops will be severely reduced. However, this fall should provide dove hunting as good or better than last year. □



National Hunting & Fishing Day
September 27, 1986

